

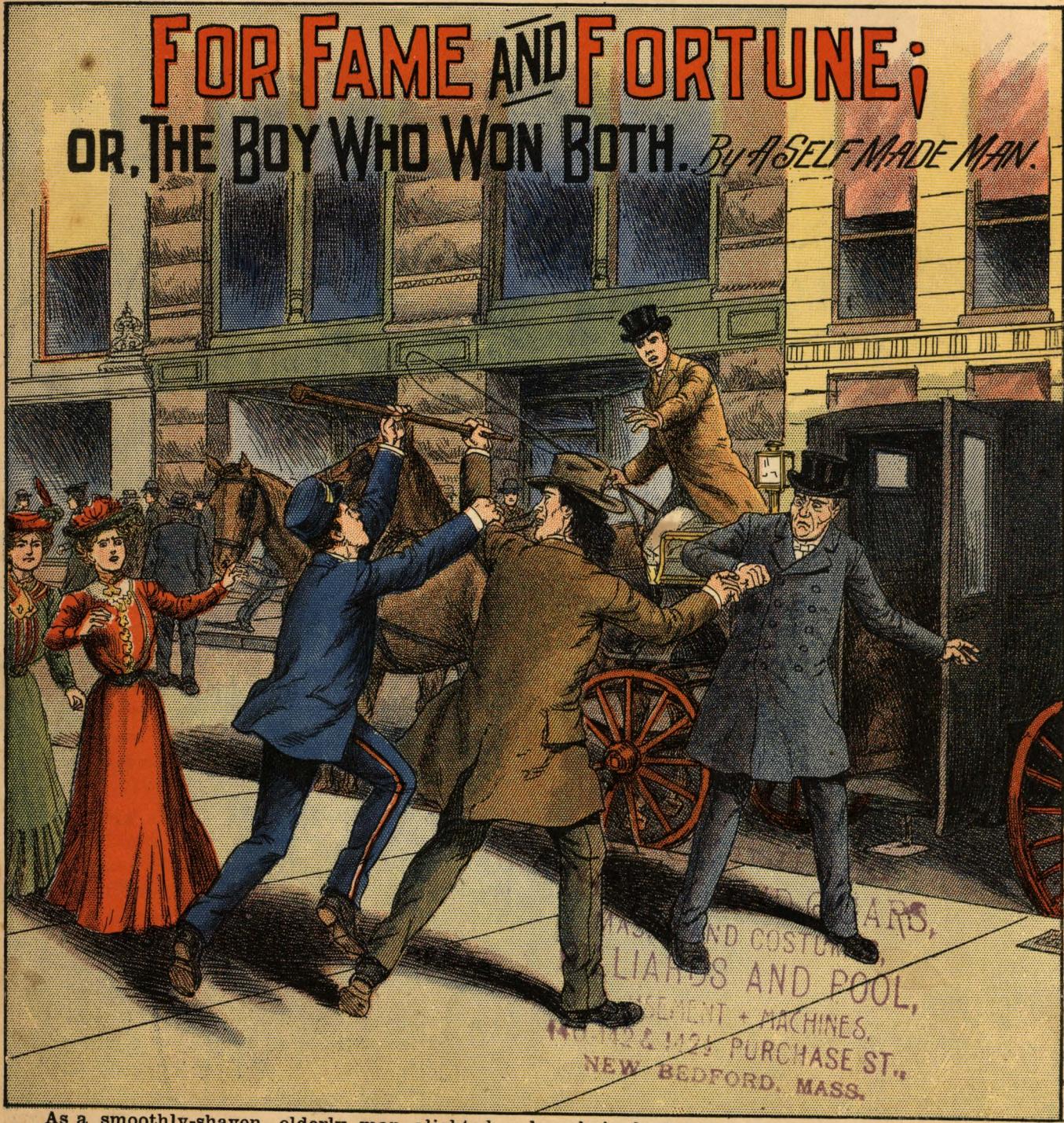
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FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF
BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

FOR FAME AND FORTUNE;
OR, THE BOY WHO WON BOTH. *By A SELF MADE MAN.*



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Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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FOR FAME AND FORTUNE

OR,

THE BOY WHO WON BOTH

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

STANLEY HOPE, MESSENGER.

Six alert-looking lads, from fourteen to eighteen years of age, sat on a long bench against the wall of an American District Telegraph Company's branch office on Twenty-third Street, New York, one bright day early in the spring.

They were all attired in the regulation uniform so familiar to the general public since the establishment of this branch of the messenger service.

Each boy had a number on his cap, and by that number was he addressed by the manager of the office during business hours whenever his services were called into requisition.

They were a cheerful lot, those particular six boys, and they seemed to enjoy their strenuous calling.

At any rate, they were quick on their feet, and were so bright and clever that they never—or, at least, very seldom—made a mistake in delivering a message, a package, a bouquet, or anything, in fact, intrusted to them.

The manager of the office took a good deal of pride in those six boys.

He often said that there were not six boys like them in any other office of the A. D. T. service.

He had money to bet on it.

This was equivalent to a challenge to the manager of any other office in the city having six or more boys under his authority to produce six of his force who could outshine the six lads of the Twenty-third Street branch.

The challenge was not accepted, although every manager of every office knew about the matter.

The manager of the Twenty-third Street branch went even further in his boasting.

Not only had he a bunch of crack messengers who could not be outdone by any similar six in the service, but he said he had one boy whose match was not to be found in the city.

That was a pretty broad assertion.

The messenger in question was No. 44.

His name was Stanley Hope.

It was an attractive name, and the boy was just as attractive as his name.

He was a handsome, curly headed youth of eighteen, the oldest of the bunch of six who on this particular morning ornamented the bench in the office while awaiting a call.

He had dark, flashing eyes, a Grecian nose, and a firm, well-built chin.

Energy, resolution and ambition showed in every line of his countenance.

He was the popular leader among the six, and what any one of the others would not do for him if called upon was not worth mentioning.

Stanley Hope had the reputation of being the most gentlemanly boy in the service.

Consequently he was a great favorite with the ladies who had frequent occasion for the services of the Twenty-third Street branch office.

He lived over somewhere on the East Side, in a small

and modest flat, with his widowed mother and crippled sister, two years younger than himself.

Anybody who knew the Hopes could easily believe that they had seen better days.

There was an indefinable air of refinement about the little widow, and her son and daughter, that the direst poverty could not wipe out.

It was the mark of gentle birth.

Some people, when luck has driven them to the wall, are forever apologizing for their situation in life.

They try to make you understand that they are not accustomed to their present situation.

That once upon a time they were ever so much better off.

The Hopes never made such bids for sympathy.

If their path in life had once been among roses they never alluded to the fact.

On the day in question Stanley Hope sat in his accustomed seat at the head of the bench, and his five associates filled the balance of the space.

"Say, fellows," spoke up Dick Diamond, "when did this happen before?"

"When did what happen before?" inquired Bob Blodgett, looking at the other.

"That we six were all together on this bench at this hour of the day. What's going to happen, anyway?"

"What should happen, except that one of us will get a call in a moment, and then there'll only be five left," said Bob, with a grin.

"Six little messengers very much alive, one got a call and then there were five," chirped Willie Walker, the youngest of the bunch, and who therefore occupied the tail-end seat.

"You can swear that you won't be the one called, Willie," said Joe Judson; "not while any of us remain."

"Is that so? Don't you flatter yourself that you stand any more chance than me. I can cover as much ground as you with my eyes shut."

"You think you can, Willie," replied Judson; "but you've another think coming."

"I'll bet you a nickel I get a call before you," asserted Walker, aggressively.

"Where's your nickel?"

"Here it is," responded Willie, fishing it out of his pocket.

"Is that the last tip you got?" asked Judson, jeeringly.

"No, it isn't the last tip I got, smarty. I'll bet I get more tips than you do."

"One bet at a time, Willie. Here's a nickel to match yours that I get a call before you," said Judson.

"I'll be the stakeholder," volunteered Sam Sprague, holding out his hand.

"Nixy," objected Judson. "I'll hold the stakes myself, because I'm going to win."

"You'll hold nothing," said Walker. "Let Sam hold the nickels."

While Willie and Joe were bickering over their bet at

the end of the bench, Stanley Hope sat silent and abstracted at the head of it, with a far-away look in his fine eyes.

"What are you thinking about, Stanley?" asked Dick Diamond.

"I'm thinking about my play," replied Hope, without changing his position.

"Your what?" exclaimed Dick, not grasping the idea at once.

"My play."

"Your play?" said Dick, in a perplexed tone. "What do you mean by that?"

"Didn't I tell you that I had written a drama?"

"Written a drama! The dickens you have! Not a regular drama such as they put on at the theaters?"

"Yes, a regular drama."

"Gee whiz! Did you hear that, Sam?" nudging his neighbor.

"Hear what?" asked Sam, who had been listening to the altercation between Joe and Willie, who were always scrapping in their way.

"Stanley says he's written a play—a real drama for the theater. What do you think of that?"

Sam was interested at once.

"What is it like, Stanley? Tell us about it, will you?" he said.

Buz-z-z-z!

That was an outside call for a messenger.

The manager glanced at the indicator and saw that the call was from the Criterion apartment house—a swell place in the vicinity, where two, three and four rooms, without kitchens, were rented at a high figure to those who could afford the luxury.

"Forty-four!" he called out.

Stanley sprang up and was at the railing in a moment.

The manager handed him a ticket with the address of the caller on it, and the boy hurried out at the door.

He turned down Fifth Avenue, walked a block or two, and then took to a cross street.

A few hundred feet west of the avenue he came to a tall, narrow building, with a white marble front and an imposing hallway entrance.

On either side of the doorway was a metallic shield of quaint design, on which in raised letters was the word "Criterion."

An iron grill-work door apparently barred admission.

It was not locked, however, and Stanley was too familiar with this kind of a door to lose any time over it.

He turned the handle and entered the long corridor.

A colored boy who was seated before a telephone switchboard directed the young messenger to the elevator and said:

"Seventh floor, front, east."

A moment or two later Stanley was dropped out on the seventh-floor corridor.

The elevator boy pointed out a certain door, and the messenger glided over to it and pushed the electric button.

A prim-looking colored maid admitted him to the inner

hall, led him into a small reception-room, and then disappeared.

In a few minutes a stunning-looking lady, attired in an expensive tea gown, swept into the room with a letter in her hand.

This was Mrs. Jack Howard, an actress professionally known as Adele Temple, who was leading woman at one of the big theatres.

Her husband was a well-known Wall Street man.

She smiled at the handsome young messenger, who stood, cap in hand, awaiting her pleasure.

"Take this note to Mr. John Bloodgood's office in the Empire Theater Building. There is no answer."

"Very well, ma'am," replied Stanley, politely.

With the envelope the lady handed Hope a dollar bill and a quarter additional.

The bill was supposed to cover the service, while the quarter was a tip.

Stanley, however, expected to make something out of the dollar bill as well, for when the time was reckoned up after he returned to the office, the change, if any, was always handed over to the messenger.

This was a premium for extra quick delivery of letters, packages, etc., which spurred the lads on to save time.

Stanley lost no time in reaching the street, and he hustled up to Fifth Avenue, thence up to Twenty-third Street, past the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and so on up Broadway in the direction of the Empire Theater Building, boarding a car at the corner of Twenty-fourth Street.

He left the car halfway between Twenty-ninth Street and Fortieth and started up the sidewalk.

As he approached the entrance to the offices in the Empire Theater Building a cab drew up beside the curb.

As a smoothly shaven elderly man alighted, a long-haired, shabby-looking individual rushed upon him with uplifted cane from the shadows of a nearby doorway.

Quick as a wink, Stanley sprang forward and seized both cane and arm.

CHAPTER II.

STANLEY IS OFFERED A NEW POSITION.

The seedy-looking man turned fiercely upon the young messenger and tried to free his arm.

"How dare you lay your hands on me, varlet!" he exclaimed in a tragic tone that savored something of the stage. "Desist, or I will strike you to the earth."

"I don't think you will," replied Stanley, coolly. "You were going to hit that gentleman with your cane."

"What do you mean, Torrens?" demanded the voice of the gentleman who had come in the cab, and who, but for the boy's timely intervention, must have been knocked to the sidewalk. "Are you mad, sir, that you make this attack on me?"

"Mad!" repeated Torrens, who was undoubtedly an actor, and apparently one of the old school. "Doubtless I am, John Bloodgood. And who has made me so but you? You,

sir—the vampire who has fed yourself on my talent and paid me not. Where is the money due me for services rendered and forgotten? Tell me that, you old varlet."

"I owe you nothing, sir," replied Mr. Bloodgood, coldly.

"Nothing! Ha, ha, ha!" with a hollow, sarcastic laugh. "Nothing! Ye gods! will you listen to that? Did you not engage me for the summer season last year to go South and draw the dollars into your cash-box?"

"I did engage you, it is true, on the strength of your past reputation, to play a small part in 'The Prodigal Son,' but you were simply rotten and I had to let you go."

"Me rotten!" roared Torrens, striking an attitude that attracted a crowd. "Me, Talbot Torrens, who has supported Booth, Barrett, McCullough, and others too numerous to mention? Me—rotten! Shade of William Shakespeare! That I should live to hear this! I throw the lie in your teeth, John Blood—why, where has he gone?"

Manager Bloodgood had taken advantage of the gathering crowd to grasp his rescuer by the arm and drag him into the vestibule of the Empire Theater Building and into the elevator, which speedily whisked them to the fifth floor.

"I am extremely obliged to you, young man, for your timely interference in my behalf," said Mr. Bloodgood. "Come with me to my office."

"You're quite welcome, sir," replied Stanley. "You are Mr. John Bloodgood, I believe?"

"That's my name."

"I have brought a note for you."

"From whom?" asked the manager, taking it.

"From Mrs. Howard, of the Criterion Apartments."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Bloodgood. "I wonder what she wants."

Stopping before a door on which was lettered, "Office of John Bloodgood's Attractions, then, in much smaller letters, "Old Missouri," "The Golden Calf," "After Dark," Mr. Bloodgood let himself in with a pass-key.

"Come in," he said, drawing the young messenger inside. "This is my New York office. I have three shows on the road, and all reports are sent to me here. I don't travel much myself, as each of my companies has an acting manager, who is responsible for everything. Take a seat. By the way, what is your name?"

"Stanley Hope, sir," replied the messenger, sitting down, though he intended to remain but a minute.

The manager seemed struck by the name.

"Stanley Hope, eh? Quite euphonious. Would make an excellent stage name, upon my word it would. Well, what can I do for you? You've placed me under considerable obligations by saving me from a knock-out at the hands of that miserable hamfatter, Talbot Torrens. I can't let the matter pass without making you some suitable compensation," and the manager's hand sought his pocket.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I can't accept any recompense for what I did. Any one would have acted as I did under the circumstances."

"Maybe they would; but you were the only one at hand, and if you hadn't jumped in and caught that fellow's arm

I should have caught a nasty blow. Come now, let me do something for you. You are a messenger, I see, at a small wage, of course. I like your appearance. I need an assistant in my office to help my stenographer. The young man I had has just left, and I was about to advertise for his successor. How would you like the show business?"

"I think I'd like it very well. I am interested in the theater. I have written a play——"

"You have done what?" asked Mr. Bloodgood, looking hard at the young messenger.

"I have written a play."

"You have, eh?" with a faint smile.

"Yes, sir," his eyes shining eagerly.

"What kind of a play?"

"It's a Western drama, in four acts."

"How old are you, young man?"

"Eighteen, sir."

The manager sat and looked at him with considerable interest.

"Have you ever been behind the scenes?"

"No, sir."

"Then you know nothing about the theater back of the curtain?"

"Only what I have seen from the front."

"And yet you have written a play. Don't you know, young man, that in order to build a house properly a man should be a carpenter?"

"Yes, sir."

"And to put a piece of machinery together in the right way a man has got to be a practical machinist?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, in order to build a play, the writing of which is a secondary consideration, the author requires a certain familiarity at least with the region in which it must be produced."

"I suppose so, sir," answered Stanley, looking somewhat discouraged, for the manager's words had greatly damped his enthusiasm of a moment before.

"However, you needn't feel downcast, young man. You're young yet. If it's in you to make a good play, you'll find the way of doing it. If your bent is in that direction, you can't do better than to come to work for me. In time I may place you with one of my road companies, on the executive staff, and then you'll have the opportunity to use your eyes and wits and learn the inner workings of the theater. What do you say? Will you accept this position in my office? I'll start you at so much per week," and the manager mentioned a sum that was three dollars in excess of what he was now getting, tips excepted.

"I should like to speak to my mother about it, sir, first, if you have no objection."

"None at all. I'll keep the place open for you the rest of the week. Call here some time after twelve not later than Saturday, or you can drop me a letter."

"All right, sir," replied Stanley, rising. "I am very much obliged to you for the offer of the position."

"Don't mention it, young man. The obligation is all

on my side. Besides, I've taken a fancy to you. I like your face. I believe you are just the boy I want."

Fifteen minutes later Stanley walked into the A. D. T. office, passed the dollar over to the manager, out of which he got just a nickel, in addition to his car fare, and then took his seat to wait for another call.

Joe Judson and Willie Walker were the only ones left on the bench, and a moment later Willie was called up to take a package uptown, and as he passed out of the door he threw a triumphant grin back at Judson, for he had won the nickel bet.

CHAPTER III.

FROM MESSENGER BOY TO MANAGER'S OFFICE.

That evening Stanley had a consultation with his mother about leaving the district messenger service and going to work for John Bloodgood, theatrical manager.

"Mother, I think, if you've no objection, I'd like to make the change. I'm tired of wearing this suit, and of being addressed as 'Forty-four.' There's no future in it, not even of being known as the crack messenger of the A. D. T. Company."

"Are you sure that your new position will be steady?" asked his mother anxiously, for her son's wages were a serious consideration with her.

Bessie, her daughter, who was a smart needleworker for her age, helped out a little with featherstitching on infants' garments; but the work was poorly paid, and the most she was able to make when work was plenty was two dollars a week.

Stanley loved his crippled sister dearly, and it was one of the ambitions of his life to make enough money to place her, as well as their little mother, on easy street.

"I guess it'll be steady, all right, mother. It's office work, and I like that much better than what I'm doing."

"Well, my son, you must decide that matter for yourself."

"But I want to know if you're willing I should take it," persisted the boy.

"I am willing you should make any change that you think is for the better. You ought to be a better judge as to that than I. You are a sensible boy, and fully realize how we are situated. I know you will do nothing to jeopardize our chances of getting on."

"Very well, mother. I'll write to Mr. Bloodgood, tell him just how I am fixed, and will give him to understand that I will accept the position on the condition that the situation is a steady one."

Dick Diamond, who had a call up in the neighborhood of the Empire Theater on the following morning, delivered the letter for Stanley.

In the afternoon Mr. Bloodgood sent a reply back by a messenger assuring Stanley that the position would be a permanent one, in one capacity or another.

He said he would like to see the boy on the following

afternoon at two, if possible, so as to arrange for him to come to work on the following Monday.

Stanley got permission to go off for an hour on the next afternoon, which was Friday, and he hurried up to Mr. Bloodgood's office.

The manager had a talk with him, introduced him to his stenographer, who worked in the reception-room of the suite, and then Stanley returned to the telegraph office to notify the manager, later on, that he was going to leave the district messenger service.

The manager was very sorry to learn of his intention, and offered him another dollar raise if he would remain.

He declined, however, having made his arrangements to the contrary.

Saturday evening, when the six were paid off, Stanley announced to his associates that his career as a messenger was over for good.

"You don't mean that!" gasped Dick Diamond, who was Stanley's particular chum.

"I do, Dick."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Bob Blodgett, with a rueful face. "What are we going to do without you?"

"Where are you going to work?" asked Sam Sprague, with a glum look.

"I've got an office position with Theatrical Manager Bloodgood, in the Empire Theater Building."

"That's where I took the letter for you, isn't it?" said Dick.

"That's the place."

"There's a mighty pretty girl in that office," said Dick, with a grin.

"She's the stenographer and general clerk," replied Stanley.

"I wouldn't mind working there myself," continued Diamond. "You don't mind if I drop in and see you, do you?"

"I hope you will, Dick. I don't want to lose you."

"I suppose it doesn't matter about the rest of us, eh?" chipped in Willie Walker. "I thought we were always going to stick together."

"I hope we will, fellows," said Stanley. "Don't be afraid, I'm not going to lose sight of you altogether—not if I can help it."

"You'll get all the passes that you want now to the different theaters, I suppose," said Joe Judson, eagerly. "I hope you won't forget us when you have any to spare. I like to go to the shows better'n anything else."

"I can't say whether I'll get any passes or not," replied Stanley; "but if I get any that I can give away you chaps shall have the first chance."

"That's right. I know you won't forget your five pals," said Bob, with a nod of his head.

"No, boys, I'm not one of the forgetting kind. Shake hands now. We may be parted, in a way, but we're comrades just the same, aren't we?"

"Sure we are," cried Willie, exuberantly.

And the other four echoed the sentiment.

They shook hands over it, swore eternal friendship, and wished their comrade good luck in his new job.

Then they separated, each going to his own home.

Stanley's office hours in his new place were from 9.30 to 4.30, and he presented himself on time at Mr. Bloodgood's office on Monday morning.

Miss Sanderson, the stenographer, did not arrive until ten that morning, and our hero had to cool his heels in the corridor till she showed up.

"Good morning, Miss Sanderson," said Stanley, pleasantly.

"Good morning, Stanley," she said, with a smile, for she had taken an instant liking to the handsome new assistant. "I'm a trifle late, though I don't get here much before ten. You'd better carry the key after this," and she handed it to him as she proceeded to take off her hat and wraps.

"Mr. Bloodgood doesn't get here till about noon, does he?"

"Seldom before two, unless he has an engagement with some one for an earlier hour. Professional people are not early risers, you know. One of our companies is in Harlem this week."

"At what theater?"

"The West End. There's some of the paper on the wall."

Stanley looked in the direction indicated and saw several colored lithographs of "Old Missouri."

Close by were lithos of "The Golden Calf" and "After Dark."

There was a stack of small photographs of members of the several companies on a shelf.

There were also quite a number of pictures of prominent actors and actresses hung about on the walls.

Miss Sanderson gave Stanley something to do, and almost before he knew it noon was around, and the stenographer asked him when he wanted to go to lunch.

She said she went out about one, and she thought he'd better go first.

He went over to a cheap quick lunch place on Sixth Avenue, and when he got back the acting manager of "Old Missouri" was waiting to see Mr. Bloodgood.

The manager came in about half-past one, and while he was talking to his representative in the private room the door opened and Mr. Talbot Torrens poked his head in at the door of the reception-room, and, seeing nobody but Stanley, he stalked in as if he owned the place.

"Is Mr. Bloodgood in?" he asked in a deep bass voice.

"Yes, sir; but he's engaged at present," replied Stanley.

"Methinks, young man, I have seen you before," he said, with a deep frown, which showed the boy that the actor evidently recognized him as the person who had defeated his attempt to get back at Manager Bloodgood for real or fancied injury.

"I think you have, too," answered Stanley, rather amused at his manner.

He had a better opportunity now to size up Mr. Torrens

than on the afternoon he saw him first under rather exciting circumstances.

He noticed that the actor had dark, piercing eyes, with hollows under them; prominent cheek-bones, a beaked nose, and long, wavy hair, upon which perched a shabby Fedora hat of ancient vintage.

Beneath a cheap overcoat could be seen his shiny Prince Albert coat, which was tightly buttoned around his body, and his right hand was thrust through it at the chest.

His legs were encased in trousers very baggy at the knees, and over his patent-leather shoes, which were all seamed and cracked, were spats which had originally been white, but which the ravages of time and mud had changed to yellow.

This man in his time had been an actor of fair ability, but was now out of date and gone to seed.

He loved to live over again what he was pleased to call his former triumphs.

He continually asserted that he would have been a great actor but for professional jealousy, which had marred his promising career.

"Are you working for the vampire?" he asked, unconsciously striking an attitude.

"Who do you mean by the vampire?" inquired Stanley.

"Who should I mean but Bloodgood? He, like others of his ilk, is sucking the blood of the profession. Are you aware, young man, that I once played with Booth?"

"No, sir. He was a fine actor, I have been told."

"Ay, ay, he was passing fair; but there are others—others from whom the demon jealousy plucked the fair flower, reputation, ere it had time to bloom in the sunshine of public approbation. I have consecrated a whole lifetime to the drama. What has it done for me?" gloomily.

As the boy could not answer that question, he wisely remained silent.

Mr. Talbot Torrens appeared to have a grievance against the drama as well as against Manager Bloodgood.

"It has done all sorts of things, not for me, but to me. But to business. As the vampire is not approachable, may I have a word with you, young man?"

"Certainly," replied Stanley, wondering what the actor wanted.

"Come hither. It is best that we be out of earshot of yon door, behind which the vampire sits like some bloated spider waiting for prey."

Stanley was new in the business, or he would not have left his seat to see what mysterious communication Mr. Torrens had to impart to him.

The seedy professional caught the boy by the arm and led him down near the outer door, much after the way in some old-time plays one actor would lead another across the stage to O. P. side in order to communicate some strange secret.

"Young man," he said in a stage whisper, "could I so far impose on your generosity as to negotiate a loan of a quarter? If not a quarter, a dime? Even the donation of the humble nickel will be thankfully appreciated, for it

will enable me to purchase a draught of the brew of Gambrinus."

"You mean beer, don't you?" laughed Stanley, handing him a five-cent piece.

At that moment there was a sound at the private door as if some one was about to enter the room.

Mr. Torrens heard it, and nervously grasping the handle of the outer door he faded away into the corridor with remarkable celerity for one of his years, while Stanley returned to his desk to continue his work.

CHAPTER IV.

SAVED AT THE POINT OF DEATH.

The first week passed away quickly and pleasantly enough to Stanley, and he told his mother when he got home on Saturday at an early hour, with his wages in his pocket, that he had never earned money easier in his life.

"I'm bound to say that, so far, I like the job first rate," he said, with some enthusiasm. "Miss Sanderson and I have things pretty much to ourselves up to noon, when people who have business with Mr. Bloodgood begin to drop in. Quite a number of professionals came in during the week and buzzed Miss Sanderson for passes for the West End, in Harlem, where one of our companies is playing 'Old Missouri' this week. They didn't always get them, just the same, though Miss Sanderson had quite a bunch of them signed in blank by Mr. Bloodgood in her desk to dispose of as her judgment dictated. As she said they had the 'standing room only' sign up nearly every night, she didn't give many away, except to matinees. She gave me a pass for two, but I gave it to Dick Diamond, as I didn't care to go away up to 125th Street, on the West Side, when the show will be at the New Star, on Lexington Avenue, next week, which is much handier for me."

On Monday evening Stanley took Bob Blodgett to see "Old Missouri," and they both enjoyed the play very much indeed.

When they came out Stanley was surprised to see Mr. Torrens standing near the entrance with a hungry look in his eyes.

His famished eyes lighted on the two boys, and, recognizing our hero, the professional immediately buttonholed him and tried to lead him aside.

"What is it—another nickel, Mr. Torrens?" he asked, laughingly.

"Nay, young man; I fain wouldst borrow fifteen cents, for I have not broken my fast all day. It is a grievous shame that I, who have played with Booth, should be reduced to such sorry straits as to have to ask for the price. Perhaps the time may come when Talbot Torrens will be able to repay with interest the stipend that nature craves to keep soul and body together."

"Come up with a nickel, Bob," said Stanley. "Here's ten cents, which is all we can afford, Mr. Torrens. We are not as yet millionaires."

"A thousand thanks, young man," replied the actor, ac-

cepting the humble offering. "Perchance I may be able to raise the other nickel from a brother professional. I will hie myself to the stage door and wait for the vampire's hirelings to appear."

"Is that one of your actors, Stanley?" asked Bob, gazing with some interest after the retreating form of the heavy man, for such Stanley had learned was that individual's line of business.

"Oh, no. He's a broken-down professional. Mr. Bloodgood engaged him for a short Southern trip last summer, but had to shake him because he couldn't make good. Since then he has been dunning the boss for ten weeks' salary, but without much success. He calls Mr. Bloodgood a vampire. I feel sorry for him, and would like to help him, for he really is in need, but I can't afford it. My mother needs every cent of my money to run the house."

"If you feel sorry for every actor you run across you'll feel miserable two-thirds of your time," remarked Bob, who knew something about the dark side of the profession.

"Professional or not, I don't like to see a man, or a woman, either, go hungry."

"If you could afford it you'd be an easy mark," laughed his friend. "Every time you left your office you'd find half a dozen actors out of a job waiting for you to give you a touch. I'll bet those two nickels you gave the heavy man will pass over the nearest bar for a couple of beers, and that he will try and fill up at the free lunch table."

"I can't help it," replied Stanley. "He'll get something to eat, at any rate, and he looks as if he needed it."

The two boys hailed a car and were carried downtown.

When Miss Sanderson arrived at the office next morning Stanley started in to tell her how much he and his friend Bob Blodgett enjoyed the show the night before.

"Old Missouri is all right," he said. "The house was packed."

"I am not surprised," replied the young lady. "The company did a record business at the West End last week. There was very little paper in the house, outside of Monday night."

"What do you mean by paper in the house, Miss Sanderson?"

"Free admissions."

"Oh, I see. I'll get used to the technical expressions of the business by and by."

"By the way, Stanley, you'd better take this letter over to the LeBrun Scenic Studio, on West — Street. They are building the scenery over there for 'On the Rhine,' the new melodrama Mr. Bloodgood will put on the road next season."

"All right. I'll get over there and back in no time. Don't forget I was an A. D. T. messenger only a little while ago."

"Oh, there's no occasion for hurry. You will probably have to wait for an answer."

Stanley took the letter, put on his hat and started for the west side of the city.

He found the building he was in search of in the storehouse and wharf district.

A big, argus-eyed watchman sat in a chair at the main entrance.

"I want to see Mr. Taylor," said Stanley.

Mr. Taylor was the scenic artist and the superintendent of the studio, and the letter brought by Stanley was addressed to him.

He was the man who planned all the work, made the models and issued the instructions to the various departments, for scene-painting was not the only thing done on the premises.

The costumes of many an elaborate production were made there.

So also were the mechanical devices, properties and wonderful lighting effects.

Looking into a huge, low-ceilinged room, where a dozen or more carpenters were busily at work on the skeleton frames of white pine, preparing them for the set pieces of scenery, the watchman called to a boy and told him to take Stanley up to Mr. Taylor's department.

"Come with me," said the youth, shaking the superfluous shavings from his apron, and he led the way through the carpenter shop out into a kind of long driveway running the entire length of the building.

Above its entrance were suspended the paint frames where the scenery was painted.

Long avenues ran off from the driveway proper, and along them Stanley saw piles of finished scenery stored.

They passed a couple of men, one of whom was working a pump-handle attached to a large barrel resting on a long trunk, while the other held the nozzle of a hose in his hand, with which he was spraying a recently painted "set-piece."

"What are they doing that for?" asked Stanley of his conductor.

"They're fireproofing the scenery," replied the boy, carelessly.

From the end of the driveway they entered upon what appeared to Stanley as a fully appointed stage, though it was not elevated like the stage of the ordinary theater.

However, it was every bit as complete in other ways, for it had its full equipment of fly galleries, a loft, and portable switchboard for electric lighting.

After leaving the stage they climbed two flights of stairs up through the fly galleries and into a storeroom, and thence up another flight into the studio, where Mr. Taylor was found.

Stanley delivered the letter to him.

"Mr. Bloodgood sent you, eh?" said the scenic artist.

"I'm from Mr. Bloodgood's office," replied the boy, politely.

While Mr. Taylor was reading the letter, Stanley looked around the room and saw hundreds of photographs of different plays mounted in frames standing around.

The carpenter lad remained in the background, prepared to pilot the visitor back the way he had brought him.

There were other rooms and interesting sights in the building that Stanley did not get the opportunity to see.

Neither did he get a glimpse of the paint frames, where several artists were painting a large drop, suspended some forty feet in the air by the thinnest of steel cables.

Mr. Taylor scribbled a reply on the back of the letter, put it back in the envelope, and handed it to Stanley with a nod of dismissal.

Then the two boys started to return to the ground floor.

On their way down one of the flights through the fly galleries they overtook an attache of the place who had charge of a well-dressed woman and lovely girl of perhaps sixteen years.

"Now, Eva, do be careful," said the lady in a warning tone to the girl, who in exuberant spirits was skipping down the stairs rather recklessly.

"Don't mind me, mamma; I'm all right," replied the young lady, turning a mischievous look back at her mother.

That glance was a fatal one, for the girl slipped as she placed her foot on a piece of rope lying in her road, and she pitched head forward from the stairs down toward the stage, forty feet below.

She uttered a piercing scream as she disappeared over into the void encumbered with a network of ropes.

Her mother, with a despairing cry, fainted in the arms of the man with them.

The carpenter lad gave a gasp of horror and turned white.

Stanley was the only one who had nerve enough to look after the falling little beauty, whom he fully expected to see lying a disfigured corpse on the stage below.

Such, however, was not the case at that moment, though her position was sufficiently perilous.

Her downward flight had been temporarily arrested by a maze of ropes, through which, however, she was surely sinking to a point where nothing could have saved her.

Had she retained presence of mind herself she might have averted the catastrophe by clinging tightly to any one of a dozen ropes around her.

But, unlike a drowning person who will grasp at a straw, she seemed dazed by her terrible situation and made no effort on her own behalf.

There was only one way to head her off, and that was a forlorn chance, seemingly, at the best.

But Stanley, wide awake and intrepid, saw the bare chance and essayed it at considerable risk to himself.

He sprang out, caught a long hanging rope that swung above the stage, slid down it like a flash, and caught the girl around the waist just as she was dropping out of the ropes that had checked her downward plunge.

He had grabbed her in the nick of time, and as his arm tightened about her, and the other gripped the rope by which he was suspended, the pair swung out into the air twenty-five feet above the hard boards of the stage, and moved backward and forward like some gigantic pendulum marking time.

CHAPTER V.

STANLEY AND THE LITTLE ACTRESS.

Eva's shriek had been heard through the building, and many of the workmen employed in the immediate vicinity of the accident rushed to the scene to find out what was the trouble.

They saw the swinging forms of Stanley and his burden in midair, and, without knowing exactly how they came to be in their dangerous situation, set to work at once to rescue them.

This was speedily accomplished by several of the men running up the narrow stairways to the fly galleries, and, laying hold of the long rope to which the boy was clinging, hauled them up to safety.

The girl never made a struggle while in Stanley's arms, but seemed to have had perfect faith in her deliverance through the efforts of the plucky boy.

By the time Stanley and Eva had been landed in one of the fly galleries the girl's mother came out of her swoon.

She called at once for her child in hysterical accents, and was comforted with the intelligence that Eva was safe.

"Where—where is she? Where is my darling Eva?" she cried.

"Here, mamma," came the ringing voice of the girl, who, with Stanley close behind, was hastening down the stairs to the point where her mother stood anxiously waiting to clasp her in her arms.

"My darling, I thought you were surely killed," cried the lady, straining her daughter to her heart.

"I would have been mamma, but for this boy. He saved me from falling to the stage below."

"A mother's blessing on you, my boy," said the lady, fervently and gratefully. "How did you save my Eva?"

Stanley explained how he had accomplished the feat.

"You are a brave lad," said the lady. "What is your name?"

"Stanley Hope, ma'am."

"My name is Price—Mrs. George Price. This is my daughter Evangeline."

Stanley politely acknowledged the introduction.

"I am very, very grateful to you, Mr. Hope, for saving my life," now spoke up the girl, taking his hand in hers. "And so is mamma, of course. You mustn't go until we have talked to you, and till you promise to call on us at our home in the Elgin, on West Forty-fourth Street."

Stanley bowed, and said he was delighted to make Miss Price's acquaintance, even under such strenuous circumstances. He further said that he would be pleased to call at her home if she wished him to.

"Of course I wish it," Eva insisted, impulsively. "I really couldn't think of not seeing you again, after what you have done for me. You really must call soon."

The two young people were evidently much taken with each other.

Miss Eva was not only strikingly pretty, but uncommonly chic and vivacious.

She talked to Stanley as if she had known him for years.

The boy thought she was the most attractive girl by long odds that he had ever met, and secretly he was pleased that it had been his good fortune to render her so signal a favor.

Eva and Stanley walked together to the main entrance, her mother and the studio attache following behind her.

"Mamma and I have just been through the building. Although I've been on the stage ever since I was a little girl I never was in a play factory before."

"What, are you an actress?" asked Stanley, in surprise.

"Why, yes. Didn't you know?"

"No, I wasn't aware of the fact."

"Then you're not connected with the profession? I thought—"

"I was an actor?" laughed Stanley. "Hardly. Do I look like one?"

"Very much indeed."

"Well, I'm slightly connected with the business. I am working for a theatrical manager who has offices in the Empire Theater Building."

"Several managers have offices there. Do you mean Mr. Broughman?"

"No. I mean Mr. Bloodgood."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed the girl, delightedly. "Why, I have just signed a contract with Mr. Bloodgood for next season. He's going to star me in a new play that is being written expressly for me. Mamma and I are just going to his office now."

"Then I shall have the pleasure of accompanying you there."

"Why, of course. Mamma, what do you think?" cried Eva, turning around.

"What is it, my dear?"

"Mr. Hope is connected with Mr. Bloodgood's office."

"Indeed? In what capacity?"

Eva looked inquiringly at her escort.

"I'm a kind of general assistant and messenger," replied Stanley.

"And I thought he was an actor, mamma. You certainly should be a good one," she added, turning to her rescuer."

"Thank you, Miss Price," replied Stanley.

"Oh, don't mention it. But I don't want you to call me Miss Price. That's too formal, now that we know each other so well. You must call me Eva, and, if you don't mind, I'll call you Stanley. It would seem so funny to me to call you Mr. Hope."

"I'll call you Eva if you insist on it, Miss Price."

"And I may call you Stanley, I suppose?"

"Of course, if you wish to."

"Thank you. After this we'll be just like old friends, won't we? You saved my life, you know, which is just too romantic for anything. It will be in the papers to-morrow," she said, as the three walked in the direction of Broadway.

"How will it? There were no reporters——"

"Oh, mamma will see that the papers get all the facts.

It will be a splendid advertisement for me. And we'll see that you get all the credit for your heroic act."

"But I don't want any credit for it, Miss—I mean Eva," objected Stanley, in some confusion. "I'm fully repaid in knowing that I saved you from a fatal fall. I'm glad to have been of service to you—in fact, there's nothing I wouldn't do to oblige you, but I don't want to get into the papers."

"I'm sorry, Mr.—I mean Stanley, but you must know that the papers never let a sensation of that kind get away from them. Even if mamma and I said nothing, Mr. Taylor, the superintendent at LeBrun's, as soon as he hears about the narrow escape I had, will telephone the particulars to each of the big dailies. When we get back to our apartments we are sure to find several reporters waiting to get all the particulars from us. So you see it will be quite impossible for you to avoid getting into print."

"Well," replied Stanley, resignedly, "if it must be, it must be. I wonder what Mr. Bloodgood will say?"

"Why, he'll be tickled to death. It will bring me quite prominently before the public, and his press agent will, no doubt, use it next season in advertising me on the road. Really, he ought to raise your salary."

"I shouldn't object to that," laughed Stanley; "though he's paying me very good wages now—several dollars more than I got as an A. D. T. messenger."

"Were you once one of those boys who run around in uniforms with a number on their caps, carrying notes and small packages, and always seem to be in a hurry?"

"I was until lately."

"I never should have thought so. I am glad you're with Mr. Bloodgood, for I'll see you whenever I call upon him."

"I hope so."

"Now you must come and see me in Mademoiselle Bonbon at the Lyric. I'll send you a pass to-morrow. I'm not playing the leading role. I've a good part, though—that of Fanfan, maid-in-waiting to Mam'selle. I introduce a specialty in the second act that is one of the hits of the piece. You must come and see me to-morrow night. You will, won't you?"

"I couldn't think of refusing you, Miss—that is, Eva. Are you billed as Eva or Evangeline Price?"

"My name appears on the programme as Evangeline Vance. Mamma's name before she married was Vance. She was many years in the profession, and was playing leading parts at McVickers', in Chicago, when papa met and married her. Then she retired. Soon after papa died I made my debut in child parts in repertoire on the road."

She then rattled on in her vivacious way about her early experiences in the business, and how she had gradually risen to soubrette parts, and finally made a hit in "The Maid and the Magpie," after which she was engaged to support Miss Dora Bancroft in "Mademoiselle Bonbon," then playing at the Lyric.

In this piece her success was so pronounced that Manager Bloodgood had agreed to star her next season in a play that should be adapted to her special abilities.

Stanley listened to her with great interest, and was sorry when they arrived in front of the Empire Theater Building, and they took an elevator for the fifth floor, where Mr. Bloodgood's offices were.

CHAPTER VI.

STANLEY TELLS EVA PRICE ABOUT HIS PLAY.

Mr. Bloodgood was in his private office, and immediately received Eva Price and her mother on their arrival.

The first thing Eva had to tell him was about her narrow escape from a terrible death in the LeBrun Studio.

The manager was not only astonished to hear her story, but amazed to learn that the handsome and clever little actress owed her life to his young assistant, Stanley Hope.

Mr. Bloodgood at once called Stanley into the private office and questioned him before the ladies as to his part in the affair.

"You are certainly a plucky lad, Stanley," he said, "and I have no doubt that Miss Price is very grateful to you for the service you rendered her."

"I am, indeed—more than I can ever express," cried Eva, impulsively. "I shall never forget it as long as I live—never!" with a shudder, as the remembrance of her peril came back to her more strongly than ever.

When mother and daughter were ready to leave for their home they went out by the reception-room in order to see Stanley and tell him that he must call at their apartments some afternoon that week, as Mr. Bloodgood had promised to let him off for that purpose, and the boy promised to do so.

Of course, Mr. Bloodgood told Miss Sanderson about Stanley's nervy and thrilling act when he called her inside to give her some dictation, and when she returned to the reception-room she regarded her young assistant with more respect and admiration than ever.

"Why didn't you tell me what you did over at the studio?" she asked him at once. "Are you so modest that you don't want to blow your own trumpet?"

"I thought I'd let you find it out through the papers, Miss Sanderson, as I understand it is bound to be printed," replied Stanley, with a flush.

"But you really ought to have told me about it when you came in, and the ladies went inside to see Mr. Bloodgood. I'm almost provoked with you for keeping the matter to yourself. Didn't you suppose that it would interest me very much to learn of your plucky action from your own lips? Why, I consider you a hero of the first magnitude."

"Don't, Miss Sanderson. It is very embarrassing to be praised for doing one's duty," protested Stanley.

"But think how you saved that girl's life, sliding down that rope at no small risk to yourself," said Miss Sanderson.

"It was the only way she could have been saved. If I had stopped to consider the risk of the venture it would have been all up with her."

"Well, I want you to tell me all about it. How did the accident happen?"

Stanley told her the particulars as he knew them, dwelling as little as possible on his own share in the affair.

"I think you are a remarkable boy," replied Miss Sanderson, decidedly, when he had finished. "You can't receive too much praise for your conduct."

Stanley made no reply, and the young lady went to her machine and began to typewrite a couple of letters from her notebook.

When Stanley returned from lunch he found a bright young reporter waiting to interview him about the studio affair.

Before he had finished, another reporter came in who represented a morning newspaper, and the boy had to go over the facts again.

A third and a fourth reporter dropped in later, and Stanley good-naturedly obliged them with the information they were in quest of.

All the later editions of the afternoon papers had a more or less graphic story in about the miraculous escape from death of Miss Evangeline Vance, the charming young actress of the Lyric Theater.

While due credit was accorded Stanley, the articles were all written around the popular favorite of the stage, making her part in the thrilling episode as prominent as possible.

This suited the boy immensely, as he was just as well pleased to play second fiddle in the newspapers.

The morning editions had fuller accounts, and Miss Eva certainly received a good deal of free advertising out of her perilous adventure.

About eleven o'clock Stanley received by messenger boy two orchestra tickets for that evening's performance at the Lyric, inclosed in a dainty note from Miss Eva, in which she thanked him all over again for his gallant conduct in saving her life, and winding up with the hope that he would not fail to be at the performance of "Mademoiselle Bonbon" that evening.

After such a strong invitation Stanley felt that he could not afford to disappoint Miss Price, so he induced his mother to accompany him to the theater.

It is probable that the little actress singled him out in the audience, for she knew the location of the seats she had sent him.

At any rate, she never appeared to better advantage than she did that night, and she imparted all the vim that was in her into her specialty in the second act, and was accorded the most tumultuous applause.

Whether Miss Bancroft, the star, was pleased or not with the extra prominence Miss Eva got that evening is not on record.

Between the second and last act an usher waited on Stanley with a note from Eva saying that she wished he would call around to the stage door after the performance was over.

When the show was over, Stanley inquired the way to the stage door, and when he and his mother made their

way there he showed the note to the watchman, who admitted them to the region behind the curtain.

It was the first time either had ever been in that part of a theater, and the boy found sufficient to interest him while waiting for Eva to appear from her dressing-room, which she did in a short time, accompanied by her mother.

Stanley introduced his mother to Eva and Mrs. Price, and then the actress invited them to take supper with herself and her mother.

They accepted the invitation.

They went to a well-known Sixth Avenue restaurant, where Eva monopolized Stanley, much to the boy's satisfaction.

Stanley and his mother left Eva and her mother at the entrance to the Elgin apartment house, on West Forty-fourth Street, and then took a car home.

After that Stanley saw a good deal of the little actress, either at the office or at her own home, and their friendship grew as the days went by.

One afternoon that Stanley called to see her he told her about the play he had written.

"Have you really written a play, Stanley?" she exclaimed, in pleased surprise.

"Yes; but I suppose it doesn't amount to anything. It is my first attempt in that line."

"You must bring it up and let me read it," she said.

"I will, if you wish me to; but I'm afraid it will only make you laugh."

"I wouldn't make fun of anything belonging to you," she protested. "What kind of a play is it?"

"It's a Western melodrama."

"That's the kind of play Mr. Bloodgood is having written for me. I'm to be featured, you know, in a kind of harum-scarum wild Western part that will give me a chance to introduce several specialties in the way of songs and dances."

"My play is something on the same order. It's called 'Nugget Nell.' Nugget Nell is the leading part—a kind of wild girl of the mines. She does all sorts of thrilling stunts at critical moments. After seeing you as Fanfan at the Lyric, I think it would just suit you if it was constructed properly for the stage."

"You interest me very much, Stanley. I am in love with the title 'Nugget Nell.' It is quite suggestive of the line of business that I'm to have in the play that Mr. Bloodgood is having written for me. Now, I want you to bring your play here to-morrow, and you and I will go over it together, and I'll make suggestions where they may be needed, and if I like your ideas and construction better than Mr. Bloodgood's play, there is no telling but that I may be able to find some excuse to turn the other down and insist of using yours."

"If you only could, Eva," said Stanley, eagerly. "I'd be tickled to death to have you act in a play of mine. I know it would be a success."

"And it would please me very much to do so. In fact,

I may say I'd rather play in one of your dramas than any one else's."

Stanley went home that afternoon feeling that a new future was opening before him.

CHAPTER VII.

"NUGGET NELL."

Stanley brought his play along with him when he came to the office next morning.

He made no mention of it to Miss Sanderson, however, but kept it hidden in one of the pockets of his overcoat.

About half-past four he was through for the day, and he made a bee-line for the Elgin apartment house, where Eva and her mother lived.

The little beauty was expecting him.

"Did you bring your play?" she asked eagerly.

"Sure I did," replied Stanley. "Isn't that why I'm here?"

"Then we'll start in and read it together. I'm just dying to see what it is like, for I've done nothing but think about that delightful name—'Nugget Nell.' It hits me hard, that title does. If your play is only half as good as its name, I am sure we'll be able to make something out of it."

Stanley got out of his overcoat and brought the manuscript of his play to the front.

"Whatever induced you to write a play, Stanley?" she asked, as they sat on the lounge together. "You must have a great liking for the stage."

"I have. I've gone to lots of shows, and I've read lots of play-books. When I got the idea in my head to write a drama I began to notice and study how the playwrights constructed their pieces. I paid particular attention to the ways in which the different characters were introduced and how the plot was developed. I saw how they sandwiched in funny business, and I took note of how the scenery was constructed and arranged on the stage. Now, if I only had some actual experience behind the scenes I think that in time I could turn out a pretty good play of the kind that Mr. Bloodgood puts on the road. They're not first class, you know. He only gets time at the second-class houses, and caters to the ordinary people, not the Broadway class."

"How long has it taken you to write this?"

"About six months, at nights, and whenever I got a chance and happened to be in the humor for writing."

"You must be pretty well educated, Stanley."

"I've been through the grammar school, and I went two years to the High School. Then father died unexpectedly, and I had to get out and hustle."

"I like your mother very much, indeed—and she's so refined."

"Thank you, Eva."

"I should dearly like to meet your sister. I think you said that she was something of a cripple?"

"Yes; Jennie had a fall when she was very young and it permanently injured her spine."

"I feel so sorry for her. I will call around some afternoon at your flat and make her acquaintance. I am sure I shall like her, if she is anything like you."

"She will be pleased to know you," replied Stanley, with a flush. "I have talked so much about you, and mother has told her that you are such a lovely girl——"

"No bouquets, Stanley, please," said Eva, laughingly.

"I am only telling you what mother says about you, and she never says what she doesn't mean."

"Your mother is very nice to have such a good opinion of poor me," replied the little actress, demurely.

"Oh, mother knows a nice girl when she meets one," answered Stanley, with an emphatic nod of his fine curly head.

"I think it is time we looked at your play," said Eva, with a sweeping glance at the handsome boy from under her long eyelashes.

It was one of those kind of glances that are always irresistible with man or boy, and it thrilled Stanley from his head to his foot.

We are bound to say that Eva was a past master in the art of feminine fascination, and she evidently meant to win the boy for her own special self.

Stanley opened his manuscript at the first page and began to read, Eva laying her clasped hands on his left shoulder and resting her dimpled chin on them.

"Act I—Scene: Interior of the Miners' Retreat, at Poker Flat. Bar near right upper entrance; door left center of back scene; table with three stools down, left center; table with two stools, right center; doors left and right."

"That sounds all right," nodded Eva, "for the stage setting of the act. You want a mountainous or landscape backing for the door at back, which is practical, I suppose—that is, it opens and shuts to admit the different characters, or to permit them to make their exit into the outer air."

"That's right," said Stanley.

"Dan Mulligan (that's the proprietor of the place, Eva) discovered wiping glasses behind the bar; Missouri Bill talking to him across bar; Sheriff Bagley and two miners drinking and playing poker at table, left hand. Enter Jacob Garnett (that's the villain) door in flat."

"That's reads well for an opening," said the little actress, approvingly.

Stanley, having finished describing the stage setting and disposition of characters at the rise of the curtain, started off with Garnett's opening remark after he made his entrance through the door from the outside.

Eva listened with great interest as the scene developed, occasionally suggesting corrections, which the young author made a note of on the margin of his manuscript.

The reading proceeded swimmingly until Stanley came to the place where Nugget Nell enters hurriedly, to music, door in flat.

Then Eva clapped her hands.

"That's just the right kind of an entrance for me," she exclaimed delightedly. "You hear the music first, you know, very low, but gradually rising, until with what they call a flourish of the orchestra I come dashing in and stand for a moment thus:"

Eva sprang up and showed Stanley just how she would come on if she was playing Nugget Nell.

"That's right," exclaimed the young playwright. "That's it exactly. Just my idea."

Then the reading went on until the first act was finished.

"I think that's just splendid," said Eva, enthusiastically. "I had no idea that you could do so well for a beginner. Now go on with act two."

The second act was declared to be much better than the first one, as, according to all rules of dramatic art, it should have been.

At the finale of the act Nugget Nell's father is accused of the murder of Mulligan, proprietor of the Miners' Retreat, by Jacob Garnett, the villain.

Nell comes forward to defend her father.

The villain laughs sardonically.

"Back, Jacob Garnett," cries Nugget Nell. "My father is no murderer. The author of this crime will come to light some day, and the only witness to it will not judge the guiltless."

"There was no witness," sneers the villain.

"Yes, there was—up thar!" exclaims Nugget Nell, pointing upward, "before whom some day you will have to stand face to face!" (Picture—curtain.)

"That's splendid," said Eva. "That would win the house every time."

Stanley then read the third act, which wound up with the main climax of the play.

The villain has succeeded in getting possession of the Poker Flat claim, which rightfully belongs to Nugget Nell's father.

He claims to have won the deed to it through a game of poker with the old man.

The miners all doubt his story, but he holds the deed to prove his statement.

"You say you won it, Jacob Garnett," cries Nugget Nell, "but you can't make me believe that you done it square. Boys," turning to the men, "lend me a stake and I'll win back dad's claim from this rascal."

The miners take up a collection and hand it to her.

The villain sneeringly accepts her challenge, and they sit at a table, while the rest crowd around.

"Now, then, Jacob Garnett," exclaims Nugget Nell, "see if you can cheat me as easily as you did my poor old dad." They play and each win a hand.

The cards are dealt for the deciding play.

Garnett raises her bet two thousand dollars.

"A short time ago you offered my dad twelve thousand dollars for the claim. I have just that sum by me, and I raise you that amount—the price you set upon the deed you hold," says Nugget Nell.

The villain laughs wickedly.

"Tis true, I did offer your father the sum you mention," he says, "but since the Poker Flat claim has been in my possession mining stocks have gone up. I now value it at sixty thousand dollars. There is the deed. I see your ten-thousand-dollar raise and go fifty thousand better."

Nell is in despair, when her lover comes to her rescue.

"Boys," says he, "did you ever hear of the Little Nugget claim up in Nevada?"

"Certainly, pard," exclaims a miner; "it's the richest mine in the district."

"Well, I'm the owner of that bit of property, and here is the dockymen to prove it. I value it at more than the Poker Flat claim, but I give it to my little pard here," handing it to Nugget Nell, "to do with as she likes."

"And I place it against that Poker Flat claim and call him," cries Nell. "What have you got?"

"Four kings," says the villain.

"Boys, I've got him," cries Nell, triumphantly.

"Ha! What do you hold?" demands Garnett.

"An old Arkansaw hand—four aces!" and Nell holds up her cards.

"Confusion!" cries the villain, drawing his knife.

"And a pair of sixes!" adds Nugget Nell, whipping out a brace of revolvers and covering the villain. (Tableau—quick curtain.)

The climax pleased and excited Eva so much that she threw her arms around the young author's neck and kissed him.

Stanley was nearly paralyzed.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS PRICE'S UNSATISFACTORY INTERVIEW WITH HER MANAGER.

"This is the play for me," the little actress exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Mr. Bloodgood must see it. I'm going to play 'Nugget Nell,' or I'll throw up my contract."

"You don't mean that, Eva," said Stanley, every nerve in his body tingling alike from the girl's kiss and her praise of his play.

"I do mean it, Stanley. Now read the last act, and let me see how it winds up."

The play ends as all plays end—with right triumphant and the villain in the hands of the law.

"You must leave your manuscript with me, Stanley. I want mother to read it, and then, after you've altered the dialogue and business where I have made the suggestions, toning down the negro and making more of the Chinaman, I'll take it to Mr. Bloodgood and insist that it is the play I mean to star in. I don't mean to tell him that you wrote it until he's accepted it, had the scenery painted and is about to order the paper,* then I'll have him put your name on every sheet as the author."

"Hold on, Eva. You forget that Mr. Bloodgood has

made a contract with Mr. Bacon, the well-known playwright, to write the play in which you are to star. He has paid him five hundred dollars down to bind the contract, and Mr. Bacon is to receive five hundred dollars for each of the four acts as he submits them and they are approved."

"I don't care," retorted the little actress. "I'll refund Mr. Bloodgood the five hundred dollars and tell him to call the deal off. I shall speak to him to-morrow about it."

"I'm afraid he won't listen to you. In the contract you made with him he is to supply the play, and you are simply engaged to create the principal part. You are to be featured as the star at a stated sum per week."

"Yes, and if the play is a frost the company will be disbanded and I will be out of work. Oh, these managers are all right—for themselves," said Eva, sarcastically. "Well, I'm going to kick right now, and kick hard."

Accordingly, next day Eva presented herself alone at Mr. Bloodgood's office and proceeded to lay the law down to her next season's manager.

He listened to the charming girl with a half-smile until she had had her say, and then he had his.

"Mr. Bacon has just sent in the first act of 'Golden Gulch,' and I want you to look it over and see how it strikes you," he said suavely.

"But it doesn't strike me at all," objected the little actress, vehemently.

"How can you tell that until you have read it?" replied Mr. Bloodgood, calmly.

"I don't want to read it."

The manager smiled indulgently.

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't like the name, for one thing—so there!" flashed Eva.

"Oh, that's immaterial. We can have another name, if we can decide on a better one."

"The play I have, 'Nugget Nell,' is the play I want," persisted the girl, with emphasis.

"You forget, Miss Price, that, according to our contract, you have no voice in the selection of the play. I am paying for it; I am furnishing the scenery and other effects; I am selecting the company and putting the show on the road. I have simply engaged you to play the leading part, and have agreed to feature you in all the paper, large and small. You will get your money every Monday, whether we pull houses or not, as long as it holds the road. I hope I have made this quite clear to you, my dear young lady. You must understand that I am not your business manager, but the manager and proprietor of the company and the play, and you are working for me. Some day, perhaps, when you are of more importance in the profession, you may be able to dictate different terms, but for the present you will please recollect that you will simply be a member of the 'Golden Gulch' company—the most important one, perhaps, but still a member, just the same. Have you anything else to say?"

"Yes; I think you are real mean and not a bit nice to

*Posters, hangers and other printed matter used to advertise a show.

me," replied the little actress, indignantly. "I've set my heart on playing 'Nugget Nell.' "

"Might I ask where you got hold of this play you are talking about?"

"Oh, I got hold of it all right," retorted Eva, with a flash of resentment in her eyes. "Don't think for a moment that you can corner all the good things in the business."

Manager Bloodgood smiled in a paternal kind of way.

"Who is the author of this production?"

"I sha'n't tell you—so there!" she retorted, defiantly.

"I'm sorry you're angry, Miss Price," replied Mr. Bloodgood, soothingly.

"I'm not angry, I'm only disappointed—that's all. I suppose you think that Mr. Bacon is the only man who can fit me with a part, just because he's got a name, and is a member of the Sheep's Club and the Dramatic Authors' Society. Well, let me tell you, Mr. Bloodgood, that the author of 'Nugget Nell' may be young, and perhaps inexperienced, but some day he'll make your Mr. Bacon look like thirty cents. When that time comes you'll be sorry that you didn't accept his first play."

Miss Evangeline Price, having spoken her mind, rose from her chair and passed out into the reception-room with the air of an injured queen.

As for Mr. Bloodgood, he smiled softly to himself, turned to his desk, and was soon deeply engaged in business.

Eva turned as she neared the door leading into the corridor and met Stanley's eye.

She beckoned to him and he followed her outside.

"You look as if you'd had a run-in with Mr. Bloodgood, Eva," said Stanley, sympathetically.

"I did," she answered, in an agitated voice. "He's a mean old bear, that's what he is."

"I'm sorry, because I suppose it was all on account of my play."

"It was. He wouldn't listen to my request that 'Nugget Nell' be substituted for Mr. Bacon's piece. He laid the law down to me in a way I didn't like at all. You'd think he's the master and I'm his slave. But I won't stand for it. I won't act in Mr. Bacon's play, not if I never act again in my life," and tears of vexation sprang into the beautiful eyes of the little actress.

"You mustn't talk this way," said Stanley, soothingly. "You know that a contract is a contract. Mr. Bloodgood can hold you to the terms of his, and if you refuse to live up to it he can enjoin you in court from acting for any other manager in the country."

"I wish I hadn't signed with him, the old bear!" cried Eva, despondently. "I am just crazy to act in your play, Stanley. I know I should make a hit in it, and I want to do that for—your sake."

"Thank you, Eva. You are very good to say that. I am greatly obliged to you for the interest you are taking in my drama, but you mustn't injure your professional outlook for me. I'd sooner destroy the play and never write another, much as I love the work and hope one day to suc-

ceed in it, than cause you the least trouble. You believe me, don't you, Eva?" and the boy looked down into her glowing face.

"Yes, Stanley, I do," she replied softly.

"I hope we may always be friends, because—well, because I like you very much, indeed."

"Of course we will always be friends, the best of friends," said the girl, impulsively, laying her dainty gloved hand on his arm. "You are my ideal, and I like you—next to mother, so there!"

She smiled archly through her glistening eyes.

"Good-bye," she added, holding out her hand, which he instantly took. "Be sure and call this afternoon or tomorrow, for I want to talk with you about 'Nugget Nell.' If I can't play the part next season, because that old ogre won't let me, I will some other time."

She started for the elevator, blowing a kiss back at him just as she vanished around the corner into the main corridor.

"She's a dear, sweet girl," breathed Stanley, as he looked after her. "I wish——"

Then he opened the door and re-entered the office.

CHAPTER IX.

STANLEY, THROUGH EVA, HELPS TALBOT TORRENS GET WORK.

When Stanley stepped out of the elevator on his way to lunch that day he ran against Talbot Torrens, the heavy man, standing in the entrance to the building and swinging his cane as though he was the best-dressed actor on the upper Rialto instead of the seediest.

"Gadzooks! Well met," exclaimed the actor, laying his shabbily gloved hand on the boy's arm. "By my halidom, thou art looking uncommonly prosperous. The vampire must be treating thee well, which methinks is not his habit. Probably he is grateful that thy strong arm shielded him that day from my just vengeance. Ah, boy, that was a seury trick which thou played upon me. But for thee I had cracked his nut and let in a little light on his sordid brain. But I hold thee no grudge for it. Prithee, hast thou got a lonesome nickel in thy trousers that thou fain wouldst loan to one who in his palm hast played with Booth?"

"Sure, Mr. Torrens," replied Stanley, handing him five cents. "I wish I could afford to give you more, for you appear to be unfortunate."

"Odds bobs! Thou hast a kind heart, and I thank thee. Aye, I am as you have observed—unfortunate. My name is up at all the agencies, but the managers will have none of me. Some one—perchance it may be the vampire—hast injured me by word of mouth, attacked my reputation as an actor. It is hard lines, young man. 'Who steals my purse steals trash; but he that filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him, and makes me poor indeed.' I will now lie me to Sixth Avenue and

invest thy largess in a plate of kidney stew, which my stomach stands much in need of."

Thus speaking, the heavy man walked off with head erect; as though he was the popular favorite, and not an actor whose fortunes were at a very low ebb, indeed.

"Poor fellow," said Stanley to himself. "It's hard, at his age, to be a cast-off professional. It's a wonder he couldn't get into the Actors' Home."

Then the boy hurried away in a thoughtful mood to his own lunch.

At half-past three, Mr. Bloodgood, with his hat and coat on, stepped into the reception-room and paused before Stanley's desk.

He dropped a package on the top of the desk, saying:

"That's the first act of 'Golden Gulch.' When you are through with what you are doing, provided Miss Sanderson doesn't need you, take it up to Miss Price, and tell her that it is my wish that she look it over carefully and return it to me as soon as possible, with her criticism, if any, or any suggestions for its improvement."

"Very well, sir," replied the boy; and the manager passed out, after a word or two with his stenographer.

At half-past four Stanley pushed the electric button at the door of the Price apartments at the Elgin and was admitted by Eva herself.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said, and she looked as if she meant it.

"I've brought you the first act of 'Golden Gulch,'" he said, handing her the packet which Mr. Bloodgood laid on his desk an hour before.

She made a wry face as she accepted it.

Then he delivered the manager's message.

"I suppose I'll have to obey orders," she said reluctantly, "but I know I sha'n't like it a bit."

"I guess you'll find it a great deal better than my crude play. Mr. Bacon is an experienced writer for the stage and knows what he's about."

"I don't care how experienced he is," pouted Eva. "I like your play, and I can do much better in what I like than in what I don't like."

"Well, there's no use arguing against Mr. Bloodgood. He's the boss. When he says that 'Golden Gulch' goes, it goes, and that's all there is to it. He's the man that's backing the show with the money, and I suppose it's right he should have the whole say."

Eva, after a talk with her mother, had come to the sensible conclusion that she would be foolish to kick against a stone wall.

She was held by her contract, and had to accept Mr. Bloodgood's dictation.

"Mother has read your play, Stanley, and she likes it very much, indeed. She says it shows much promise, and thinks that with more experience you ought to make an opening for yourself in that line. She agrees with me that it would just suit my talents; but as 'Golden Gulch' seems to be the play I'll have to star in, why, I must give up all idea of appearing in 'Nugget Nell' for the present."

"That's the way I look at it," said Stanley, regretfully.

"But I intend to play in it yet, Stanley," said the little actress, with a decided nod of her golden head. "So I want you to rewrite it for me in accordance with my suggestions."

"I'll do that," replied Stanley, eagerly.

She brought out his manuscript and together they went over it, and she pointed out the changes she wanted, and which she said would make it go better.

She also indicated where a lot of dialogue could be materially reduced without hurting the scene.

When the boy took up his hat to go she said:

"Now, Stanley, I want you to go on the road with me next season."

"I'd like to," he replied wistfully, "but I don't see how I can."

"Why not? Mr. Bloodgood will have to provide a new executive staff with the 'Golden Gulch' company. Now, you ask him to let you go out in some capacity, as you are anxious to learn the practical side of the show business."

"He told me that he intended to send me out some time with one of his companies, but I guess he meant after a year or so."

"Never mind what you think he meant; just strike him for a position with 'Golden Gulch,' and I will put in a good word for you, too."

"Will you?"

"I will, and he'll be willing to oblige me that much, I guess. If he objects there'll be something doing," she said spiritedly.

"What a little fighter you are, Eva," laughed Stanley. "Don't you know that it won't do the least bit of good to have another run-in with Mr. Bloodgood. If he wants me in New York I'll have to stay here. However, he owes me a favor for saving his head from getting broken, and perhaps he'll agree to let me go out with the company which you will head."

"How did you save Mr. Bloodgood from getting a broken head?" asked the girl, who had not heard about the incident.

Stanley told her of the attack made upon the manager by Talbot Torrens, the heavy man, and how he happened to be on the scene in time to save Mr. Bloodgood.

"If it hadn't been for that affair I still would be an A. D. T. messenger, and should not have the pleasure of knowing you," he concluded.

"And I would probably be dead and buried now, for you wouldn't have been at the LeBrun studio that morning when I fell from the stairs into the flies of the stage."

"That's right," nodded Stanley. "Indirectly, Talbot Torrens saved your life by being the cause of Mr. Bloodgood hiring me."

"It's funny how things come out in this world, isn't it?" she said thoughtfully.

"Yes. Poor old Torrens is on his last legs as an actor."

"How is that?" asked Eva.

"He hasn't a cent of money and can't get an engagement."

"Why can't he?"

"Because I guess he's out of date. Nobody wants him."

"How does he live, then?"

"How do lots of people live who haven't a cent? By begging from their friends, if they have any, or from anybody at all. Mr. Torrens lives on the nickels he manages to pick up."

"If you say he indirectly saved my life I must help him," said Eva, generously. "I know Mrs. Brown, the theatrical agent, well. I'll beg her to get Mr. Torrens something to do. What's his line of business?"

"Heavies; but I dare say he'll take anything that comes along."

"Have you his address?"

"No; but I see him every day or two about lunch time. He's discovered that I'm good for a nickel, and I find him waiting at the door."

Eva was as good as her word.

She spoke to Mrs. Brown, with the result that Talbot Torrens got an opening with a cheap repertoire company that wanted a heavy man.

Eva paid Mrs. Brown her commission, and gave Mr. Torrens a ten-dollar bill to help him get into shape.

The actor seemed to be grateful to both her and Stanley for the boost, and swore he'd make it all right some day.

At any rate, it was a kindly act on the little actress's part, and kind acts are never lost.

CHAPTER X.

A PIECE OF VILLAINY WHICH RESULTS IN A REAL SENSATION.

The theatrical season came to an end in New York about the last of May.

The run of "Mademoiselle Bonbon" at the Lyric closed on the first of June, and Eva Price was at liberty.

Then she and her mother went to the Catskills for a rest.

Stanley continued at Mr. Bloodgood's, but he and Miss Sanderson had a snap during the summer.

Mr. Bloodgood engaged the company that was to support Eva Price in "Golden Gulch," and by the first of August the LeBrun studio had completed and packed ready for shipment all the scenery, properties and mechanical effects necessary for the proper production of the play.

The manager had agreed to send Stanley out as assistant to the acting manager of the company, and after a conference with that gentleman the boy found that he would be expected to lend a hand wherever his services could be found available, even to giving the property man a lift.

A "call" was printed in a theatrical weekly notifying the members of the four attractions controlled by Mr. Bloodgood to report at the Broadway office for instructions regarding rehearsals that were to be begun at once on the stage of a city theater, the temporary use of which Mr. Bloodgood had secured for that purpose.

Of course, on the day in question Eva Price was among those present.

The rehearsals of "Golden Gulch" were to be held every other day, under the personal direction of the author.

Stanley managed to be present at a number of these, and picked up a great many valuable points.

Eva's part was somewhat similar to Bret Harte's "M'liss," and in many respects not unlike Stanley's own "Nugget Nell."

Its situations were not so broad and melodramatic as the boy's play, though there was one uncommon "thriller" at the close of the third act.

Stanley thought it was lacking in the humorous element, as the one low comedy part was not especially prominent.

The play, however, had been written to make everything subservient to "Miggles," Eva's part, and Stanley thought it ought to have been named "Miggles."

In view of the fact that her son was going on the road, Mrs. Hope had saved up a little fund to tide Jennie and herself over until Stanley began weekly remittances from the different towns on his route.

Eva's mother, who had taken a great liking to Mrs. Hope and her invalid mother, however, proposed that the three take a small, genteel flat uptown and share the living expenses, Mrs. Price agreeing to contribute the larger part of the rent.

This arrangement greatly pleased Stanley, and it was carried into effect.

Rehearsals of "Golden Gulch" progressed without the occurrence of anything of a remarkable nature, theatrically considered, and gradually the members of the company familiarized themselves with the lines and business of their respective parts.

The company was to open at Hornellsville, N. Y., on Monday, September 1, for one night, and then work its way west over the route selected.

The advance agents of the organization in due time departed for that town, and two days later Miss Sanderson showed Stanley the following telegram, which came into the office while he was there:

"Hornellsville, N. Y., Aug. 27.
"Mr. John Bloodgood,

"No. — Broadway, New York.

"Town worked up in good shape. House (theater) dark all week. Ought to play to S. R. O. (standing room only).

"WILLIAM L. SINGER."

"That looks encouraging," remarked Stanley.

"Very," responded the stenographer.

From Mr. Singer there came by mail a few days later a bulky letter of advices for the benefit of all concerned with the company.

This letter, which contained useful information relating to the hotels in Hornellsville, the arrivals and departures of the trains they were to use, etc., was posted up conspicuously in the theater where the company was rehearsing.

On Sunday morning the members of the company met at the Erie station in Jersey City to take a certain train for Hornellsville.

Stanley and Eva arrived together and took a seat side by side in the car.

The train reached the company's destination at about six o'clock, and, as members of the profession usually put up at the DeSota House, all hands got into the hotel's free bus and reached the caravansary in time for dinner.

At ten o'clock next morning the company went to the Opera House for the final rehearsal.

Two hours before that time Stanley accompanied the property man to the depot, where the car containing the scenery, baggage and other effects of the organization had been switched to a siding, and helped the transfer people get the stuff on their big wagon.

On arriving at the theater, Stanley saw that the trunks of the members of the company were placed in the proper dressing-rooms, according to a list furnished by the stage manager, after which he helped the property man and the electrician.

The business manager then gave him a list, forwarded by the advance agent, of all the stores where a free ticket had been left to pay for billboard privileges, and told him to go around and see that the company's lithographs and other small printing was properly displayed, and to make a note of any delinquencies.

This job took him some time, and then he was through for the day.

The fact that there had been no attraction at the Opera House during the preceding week gave a good boost to the advance sale of seats, and Stanley learned that about half the house was sold.

He carried this news to Eva, and naturally she was delighted to hear it.

"We're bound to have a good house to-night," she said, "as the indications all point that way."

"That's right," nodded Stanley. "Mr. Singer wired Mr. Bloodgood last Wednesday that he expected we would play to the capacity of the Opera House."

After dinner the members of the company started for the Opera House to dress.

As Stanley had nothing to do in the front of the house, which was looked after by the business manager, he had been pressed into a small part, one of the miners, by the stage manager, and his name appeared in the programme.

At eight o'clock the theater was practically full, and the play began.

Eva Price, or Evangeline Vance, as she appeared in the bills, was received with enthusiasm, and she proved to be the whole show.

Her specialties were vociferously encored, and by the time the curtain rose on the third act it was admitted she had made a big hit.

There were two scenes in this act.

In the first the villain arranges to do up the leading man, Miggles's lover, by sending him a decoy letter to meet Mig-

gles near the great flume which crosses a lonesome defile in the mountains, and the villain's confederate brings back word that the lover will keep the appointment.

The two scoundrels then start for the defile to trap the unsuspecting man.

Miggles hears of this piece of treachery too late to warn her lover, and then decides that the only way she can reach the place of meeting in time, perhaps, to foil the rascals is by floating down the swift current of the flume on a log.

In this case the flume, which is an artificial channel for conveying water, consisted of a long, sectional wooden trough, elevated on stilts, and was supposed to extend for several miles down the mountains to the place where the gold washing was going on.

A section of this flume was shown in the second, or great, scene of act three of the drama, which represented a running stream and waterfall, which was one of the mechanical effects of the piece.

The scene was short but sensational.

The flume ran from the extreme right upper entrance diagonally across stage to second entrance, right hand, and Eva Price, in the character of Miggles, was to traverse its entire length on an imitation log at the critical part of the drama, arriving at the point where there was a "run," or inclined plane, to the stage, in time to save her lover and defeat the villain.

The flume, which was set before the curtain went up on the act, was supported by stout pieces of wood kept in place by iron braces fastened by small bolts to the stage.

When in place each upright was examined by the carpenter to make sure that it was secure, for any mishap might prove a serious matter to Eva.

Just before the front cloth (scene) was lifted to reveal the defile and canyon, Stanley, who was standing near the upper entrance waiting for Eva to climb up to her log, held in position for her by a stage hand, noticed one of the local stage hands, an ill-looking fellow named Smith, whose nephew had been thrown out of the theater during rehearsal that afternoon by the stage manager of the company, approach the center uprights in a somewhat stealthy manner and try them.

The man had no call to do this, as the carpenter had already tested the stilts, and Stanley was about to call him away, when the stage manager shouted for the boy, and he hurried off to see what was wanted.

The moment he was gone the man Smith took a small wrench from under his vest, stooped down and dexterously removed the bolts from the clamps at the base of two of the uprights, tilting them just sufficiently so that when Eva in her downward flight struck that section of the flume the jar would cause it to topple over and precipitate the girl to the stage.

When Stanley returned a few minutes later his sharp eyes noticed that the flume looked a bit out of plumb, and he would have called the carpenter's attention to the fact but that at that moment the drop in front was raised and the scene was on.

Eva was already seated on the log at the elevated end of the flume in readiness for her cue to come on.

Stanley was anxious for her safety in this act, for he felt that there was an element of danger in her swift flight downward across the stage.

Therefore the longer he looked at the tampered uprights the more nervous he became as the moment for her descent approached.

He determined not to leave the spot until she had accomplished her sensational entrance.

At last Eva got her cue, the stage hand pushed her forward, and she shot into view of the audience.

The feelings of the spectators had been wound up to the highest pitch by the unfortunate position of Miggles's lover, who had been captured by the villains, bound hand and foot, and was about to be thrown into the canyon.

When Eva appeared, coming to the rescue, the audience burst into applause, for they scented the discomfiture of the villains.

Stanley's anxious eyes followed Eva's downward flight, and he saw the unsupported section of the flume tremble, then wobble, then—

"Great Scott! It will be down!" he cried excitedly.

At that moment there was a splintering of wood, a lurch of the structure, a snap, then a crash.

The two supports fell to the stage, the flume split asunder, and Eva, with a thrilling scream, pitched head first straight for the edge of one of the tree wings.

But Stanley was equal to the emergency.

He sprang forward, caught her in his arms, and all would have been well but for the fact that the fractured flume in falling caught the boy above the temple, and he went down, with Eva clasped in his arms, like a shot, rolled on his side, and lay there motionless like one dead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACCIDENT ACCOUNTED FOR, AND EVA AND STANLEY CALLED BEFORE THE CURTAIN.

The unexpected accident which had happened to the "star" of the play created great excitement both before and behind the curtain.

The act came to a sudden termination in a manner not down in the bills, and the stage manager ordered the prompter to ring down the proscenium drop as he ran on to the stage to find out the extent of the catastrophe.

It was found that Eva Price was not injured in the least. Stanley had caught her in the nick of time.

The boy, however, lay white and bleeding on the stage, still clasping the little actress in a vice-like grip.

Eva was released from his embrace, but before any one could congratulate her upon her wonderful escape she threw her arms around Stanley, raised his blood-stained head on her lap and burst into a passionate expression of grief.

"Oh, he is dead! He is dead!" she cried vehemently.

"Get a doctor. Do something to bring him back to life."

The stage manager sent a messenger across the back street for a physician who lived nearly opposite the stage door, and the doctor was soon on the spot.

He examined Stanley and pronounced him merely stunned and not seriously hurt.

Eva was nearly beside herself with delight when she heard the physician's verdict, but she would not allow any one to touch Stanley until the doctor requested that he be removed to a lounge behind the wings.

While the man of physic was restoring the lad to consciousness the stage manager went before the curtain and reassured the audience.

Then the orchestra started in to fill in time, and the stage manager began an investigation of the accident.

"There's been some crooked business at work here," said the master carpenter, pointing to the wrecked section of the flume.

"What do you mean?" demanded the stage manager, sharply.

"Do you see those two uprights?"

"I do."

"Well, do you see any sign of the bolts that held the clamps to the stage?"

"I do not."

"When that flume was set every bolt was in its place, and the uprights were as firm as so many rocks. I tested them myself to make sure that no accident could take place."

"But it seems an accident has taken place. How do you account for it?"

"Since I examined the structure the bolts of those two uprights were surreptitiously removed by some scoundrel for the purpose of bringing about the very catastrophe which has happened."

"Good heavens, man, you can't mean that!" fairly gasped the stage manager.

"I do mean it, for everything points in that direction. If the bolts had in some unaccountable way worked loose they would be lying around in the debris. Instead of which, I haven't been able to find one of the eight that I know were put through the clamps. It is the work of some infernal rascal on the stage."

"Who could be guilty of such a diabolical act? Why, the girl might have been killed."

"She would have been seriously injured but for young Stanley. When I heard the snapping of the trough I rushed in this direction and saw Miss Price pitching straight for the corner of that wing. Then the boy flashed before my eyes. As she landed in his arms the broken flume struck him on the head, and down he went like an ox stricken in the shambles. That boy deserves a medal from the manager, for he saved the star of the show from a knock-out."

At that moment the comedian of the organization stepped up to the stage manager and said that Stanley wanted to see him.

The man went at once to the place where the boy sat

th his head bound up, and Eva beside him on the lounge, th the members of the company around them both.

"Have you discovered any cause to account for the eaking of the flume, sir?" asked Stanley.

"I am sorry to say that the carpenter asserts that there as been foul play at the bottom of it."

"Foul play!" cried Eva, in dismay.

"Foul play!" echoed the members of the company, ghaſt.

"The screws that were put into the clamps to hold down hose two particular uprights are not to be found. It looks is though they had been drawn by some unknown person with malicious intent. If I find out the guilty person, by the eternal I'll make an example of him!"

"Well, sir," said Stanley, "I don't want to make an accusation, but just before the front scene was pulled up I saw one of the local stage hands walk over to one of those uprights and try it."

"He did?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you identify the man?"

"I can."

The stage manager started off to round up the stage assistants connected with the Opera House.

He found one of them missing—the fellow named Smith.

The others were brought before Stanley, but the boy said none of them was the man he had reference to.

"Then it must be that man Smith," exclaimed the stage manager, with a dark look. "That fellow has a hang-dog look, anyway, and his nephew, whom I fired out this afternoon for intoxication, isn't a whit better. The man must be found."

The stage manager went away to inquire of the watchman when Smith had left the building.

In the meantime the carpenter was having the stage setting of the late act removed and the scenery for the last act, a plain interior, put in place so that the drama could be finished.

Smith was located in a corner dramshop by the stage and business managers and was sharply questioned.

He was surly and defiant, and his answers so suspicious that an officer was called in to help sift the matter.

It was decided to search him on the chance that the missing bolts might be on his person.

He showed fight at this suggestion, but when the policeman threatened to club him if he lifted his fists he sullenly submitted to the search.

The eight missing bolts were found in one of his pockets.

The stage manager was so furious at the discovery of the rascal's guilt that he was with some difficulty restrained from pummeling Smith on the spot.

Taxed with his crime, the fellow reluctantly admitted his guilt, and said that he did it out of revenge for the ejection of his nephew from the Opera House that afternoon.

He was removed to the station-house, the business manager going along to make the charge against him.

When the stage manager returned to the theater he ordered the performance to proceed, but prior to the rise of the curtain he told Eva and Stanley to go before the curtain, as the spectators had made repeated calls for the little actress and the young man who had saved her.

Accordingly, Eva led Stanley before the footlights, much against his will.

They were received with a storm of applause, and bowed their acknowledgments.

After all, it was probably the proudest moment in the boy's life.

CHAPTER XII.

"GOLDEN GULCH" GOES UP IN SMOKE.

The Hornellsville papers next morning had a review of the show and a full account of the accident at the Opera House.

Stanley received great praise for his gallant rescue of the star, and reference was also made, on information furnished by the business manager to his plucky conduct in saving Eva's life months before at the LeBrun scenic studio in New York.

Altogether he was boosted before the public as a hero of the first magnitude, and shared with Eva, when they both came into court that morning, the attention of a packed mob of spectators.

The boy's evidence, but mainly the fact that the bolts were found on Smith's person, caused the magistrate to hold the rascal for trial.

Depositions were made before a notary, to be used at the trial, by Stanley, the stage and business managers, as it would not be convenient for them to appear in person when wanted.

Smith was tried in due time, convicted, and sent to State's prison for two years.

The company started for the next town on their route at one o'clock, but the train was delayed owing to a washout caused by a big thunder-storm of the preceding night, and they arrived at their destination only in time to go to the theater without dinner.

They had a big house, for the news of the accident at the Hornellsville Opera House had been republished in the local papers, and lots of people, in consequence, came to see the heroine of the disaster.

The performance passed off without a hitch, and next morning the show moved on again.

There was more trouble in store for them, however, for on arriving in the town where they were billed to appear that evening the business manager found that the local authorities had just closed the Opera House on the ground that it was unsafe.

No performance was permitted, and the company had to remain idle that night.

Next day a smash-up along the railroad caused several hours' delay, and by the time the wreck was cleared away and their train proceeded on its way so many hours had

been lost that the local manager had dismissed a large audience and the house was dark when they reached the town.

The performers began to look glum now and declare that there was a hoodoo on the organization.

This impression was strengthened next day, which was Friday, by a third hold-up on the railroad, and they barely connected with the theater in time to give the performance.

Even the sprightly Eva expressed a conviction that the company was doomed to misfortune in some shape or another, and might go to pieces.

"That's all nonsense!" laughed Stanley. "There's no such thing as a hoodoo."

"But there is," persisted the girl, with a positive nod of her head.

"What makes you think so?"

"Lots of things."

"Name some of them."

"Look at the trouble we've been up against right from the start."

"Pooh! All except the rascality of that man Smith were unavoidable accidents, liable to happen any time."

However, they showed in Toledo all right Saturday night and drew a big house.

They reached Chicago Sunday afternoon, where they had a week stand.

The scenery and baggage were removed to the theater before dark, and the business manager announced that the prospect that they would play to big business during the week was good.

But the culminating calamity of their short tour happened that night.

The theater was destroyed by fire, and everything connected with the show, except the performers' personal effects, which they had carried to their hotel, went up in smoke.

A dispatch announcing this disaster was wired to Manager Bloodgood in New York, and he ordered the company disbanded and the people to be furnished with transportation to the metropolis.

Eva, however, received a vaudeville offer for a week in Chicago, and decided to accept it and remain over.

She persuaded Stanley to remain as her protector, as she called it, insisting on paying his expenses for the favor.

During the week Eva's thoughts reverted to Stanley's play of "Nugget Nell," the manuscript of which he had brought along, at her request, to polish up.

"If we only could get an 'angel,'* Stanley, we might be able to bring out your play," said Eva, one day during the week.

"Well, I wish we could run across one, then. I think it would be a good investment for him. You made a big hit in Miggles, as far as you went, and "Nugget Nell" offers you the same opportunities to repeat your success. By the way, I ran across Mr. Singer this morning. He's in town. It would be a great thing if we could fill in the

bulk of the 'Golden Gulch' dates with 'Nugget Nell,' wouldn't it?"

"It would be just splendid," replied Eva, enthusiastically.

"Mr. Singer knows the whole route. I've a great mind to speak to him about the matter and ask him what the chance is of getting a backer to put my play on the road, with you as the star."

"I would. It would be a good thing for him, too, as he's been unexpectedly thrown out of work with the rest of us."

So Stanley hunted up the advance agent at his hotel next day and broached his and Eva's plan.

"Why don't you two go back to New York next week and put it up to Mr. Bloodgood? You've got your railroad tickets. If Bloodgood intends to shelve 'Golden Gulch' until next season, he may, perhaps, consider your scheme."

"Well, come up this afternoon and talk to Eva about it. Whatever she says goes with me."

Mr. Singer agreed to call at their hotel and they parted. Stanley strolled down to the lake to pass an hour.

He went out on a steamboat dock and sat down on a spilehead in the sun.

While he was there a crowd gathered on the wharf to take a steamer up the lake.

Among them Stanley noticed a handsomely dressed lady, accompanied by a little boy.

The boy had the usually exuberant spirits of a healthy child, and he persisted in breaking away from his mother time and again to pick up stones and chips of wood to throw out into the water.

After exhausting all the ammunition in his immediate locality he was quiet until he spied a stone lying on a stringpiece, and, snatching his hand away from his mother's detaining grasp, he darted for the stone.

It happened that a piece of rope was stretched across the dock at this point close to the boards.

The boy in his eagerness did not observe it, and the consequence was he tripped over it, struck his head on the low stringer and rolled into the water.

It all happened like a flash under Stanley's eye, and the mother's terrified scream had hardly awakened the echoes of the dock and startled the crowd before he was ready for action.

He rushed to the point whence the child had fallen, and a moment later saw his body rise slowly to the surface a dozen feet out in the lake.

There was no boat within immediate reach, and Stanley did the only thing he could do under the circumstances to save the child's life—he threw off his coat and sprang into the water after him.

CHAPTER XIII.

STANLEY SAVES A LIFE AND FINDS AN ANGEL.

Great excitement and some confusion ensued on the dock.

*A moneyed individual who backs a show.

Fifty pair of eyes followed the efforts of Stanley Hope save the imperiled child.

The frantic mother had to be firmly held to prevent her from leaping overboard also.

As soon as possible some of the longshoremen in the vicinity procured a boat and started out to pick up Stanley and the boy, if he succeeded in preventing the child from going to the bottom for good.

In the meantime, Stanley, who was an excellent swimmer, was doing his level best to reach the little boy.

In spite of his best efforts the child went down a second time, and he came up so slowly that Stanley was afraid he was gone for good.

However, he finally reappeared close by, and our hero, after one vigorous stroke, seized him by the jacket.

Turning around to retrace his way to the wharf, he saw the boat coming, and by treading water waited for it to come up and take them aboard.

The child was unconscious and looked to be a goner.

Vigorous methods, however, brought back animation, after rescuer and rescued had been landed at the head of the dock.

A physician happened to be present, and he helped the good work along.

The mother was overjoyed to have her child so providentially restored to her.

She could not thank Stanley enough.

"You must give me your name and address," she insisted, when the lad said that he guessed he'd better go somewhere to have his soaked clothes dried.

"My name is Stanley Hope, ma'am, and I am stopping for the rest of the week at the St. Charles Hotel."

The lady wrote it down, and then handed Stanley one of her cards, on which her address, Pacific Avenue, was printed.

"My husband will call and see you this evening," she said. "He will never be satisfied until he has thanked you for saving the life of our little boy."

"It isn't necessary for him to thank me, ma'am. You have already expressed your gratitude in unmistakable terms. I did the best thing I could under the circumstances, and I am glad that I was able to save your child."

Stanley then got away from the crowd, and going to a small nearby hotel made arrangements to have his apparel dried out, while he was permitted to occupy a room during the interval.

He got back to his hotel in time to go down to lunch with Eva, and he entertained her with an account of his adventure along the lakeside.

"My gracious, Stanley!" exclaimed the little actress. "You are getting to be a professional life-saver."

"It isn't my fault," replied the boy. "Things just happen when I'm around, and I have to jump in and pull the victims out of the fire."

"It's funny how so many accidents have happened in a few months in your presence."

"Maybe I'm what you call a hoodoo," laughed Stanley, "and I cause these accidents to happen."

"Well, if you do, you have all the trouble of saving the unfortunates," she smiled.

Mr. Singer did not call that afternoon to talk things over with Eva and Stanley, as he had promised to do, though they waited for him with some impatience.

"I guess he isn't interested very much in us," remarked the boy, in a tone of disgust. "He probably finds more amusement in some billiard hall."

"Never mind," replied Eva. "Mr. Singer isn't the only advance man in the business."

"But he's got a record of the late 'Golden Gulch' route in his trunk, for he told me so this morning. If we can form a company to put 'Nugget Nell' on the road, it would save us lots of trouble if we could annex the dates on the said routes."

"We'll have to do that pretty soon, or it won't amount to much. Mr. Bloodgood has probably notified the local managers all along the route to fill his time with some other attraction, and they are bound to do it if they can."

"Well, it can't be helped. How long do you suppose it would take us to engage a company and have scenery painted, and props and effects made up, if I advertised and caught a man willing to take charge of the venture?"

"Not so long in an emergency. You see, 'Nugget Nell' only needs four scenes, and they are easy ones to paint. No complicated effects are required like the flume in the canyon scene of 'Golden Gulch.' I guess I can come pretty near giving the show myself, for Nugget Nell is constantly holding the stage. Under those circumstances we could hire a company, for that matter. If the show made money we could gradually weed them out for better ones."

Just then there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," sang out Stanley.

To their great surprise who should walk in but Talbot Torrens, looking a couple of hundred per cent. improved over what he was in New York some months since.

"How do you do, Mr. Torrens?" said Stanley. "Glad to see you. Please come in and shut the door."

"Marry and well met; this is indeed a glad surprise," said Mr. Torrens, walking toward them and gallantly kissing the tip of his gloved hand at Miss Price.

"How did you happen to locate us, Mr. Torrens, and what are you doing in Chicago?" asked Stanley.

"It were easily done," said the actor, taking possession of a convenient chair. "I did perceive upon the billboards in front of the Gaiety Theater the name I have cherished in my heart even as a benefactor—Miss Evangeline Vance. Forsooth, to me it was a great surprise to perceive that this lady had gone into vaudeville. I hied me at once to the box office, got your address, sweet one, and came hither on the wings of the wind."

"Well, I am glad to see you, Mr. Torrens," said Eva, with a gracious smile. "How happens it that you are in Chicago? Are you playing here?"

"Nay, I am not playing, Miss Vance," addressing the

little actress by her stage name. "The company I was out with closed two weeks since, and my name is again on the books."

"I am glad to see that you appear to be more prosperous than when in New York," said Stanley, with a smile.

"Odds bodkins! Be not deceived by my external habiliments. I have barely the price of a week's board in my purse. It is passing strange, but money and I are not close acquaintances."

The old actor remained for an hour with the young people, and hardly had he departed before a bellboy brought up the card of a gentleman who wished to see Stanley.

The boy went downstairs, and the caller, a fine-looking and handsomely dressed man, was pointed out to him.

"You wished to see me, sir?" asked Stanley, going up to him.

"Are you Stanley Hope, the lad who jumped off the Rosedale excursion pier this morning and save the life of a little boy?" asked the gentleman, turning to him.

"Yes, sir."

The caller seized him by the hand and shook it warmly.

"That was my little son you rescued, and I have called to express to you my heartfelt gratitude, and to make you some sort of a substantial acknowledgment for a service which mere money can never wholly repay. My name is George Clarke."

"I am glad to know you, Mr. Clarke. I am also glad I was able to render you a service. But I didn't jump overboard after your little boy with any expectations of being rewarded for it."

"I am sure you didn't, young man; but nevertheless, as I'm a prosperous broker, it is only right that I should make you a present. I should like to give you my check for five thousand dollars as—"

"I hope you won't do any such thing as that, for I should certainly refuse it. I am quite satisfied with your thanks, for I only did my duty in trying to save your son."

"I honor your scruples, young man, about accepting anything in the nature of pay, but you ought to permit me to make you a present."

"Well, sir, as the water did not improve my clothes, and these are the best I have this side of New York, you can present me with a new suit if you like."

"You shall have the best suit that a Chicago tailor can produce," said the grateful gentleman. "That, however, is but a small matter. What else can I do for you? Think, for I am anxious to show my gratitude."

"There is nothing else you can do for me—that is," added Stanley, as the thought suddenly struck him, "unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Mr. Clarke, eagerly, as the boy hesitated.

"Will you come into the reading-room, and I will tell you?" he said.

"Certainly," said the broker, and they adjourned to that room, which had but a single occupant at the time. "Now what is it?" he continued, as they seated themselves.

"Speak out. If I can help you in any way I will do it with pleasure."

Stanley, after briefly telling the Chicago broker of his connection with Mr. John Bloodgood, the New York theatrical manager, and about his short experience with the "Golden Gulch" company on the road, explained to Mr. Clarke that he had written a Western drama which he was very anxious to bring before the public.

"The star part just fits one of the brightest little actresses on the stage to-day, who is the dearest friend I have, next to my mother and sister. I refer to Miss Eva Price, who is doing a turn in vaudeville this week at the Gaiety under her stage name of Evangeline Vance."

"Why, a party of us saw her last night," said the broker. "She's uncommonly pretty and undoubtedly remarkably clever."

"Well, Mr. Clarke, if you'll loan me the money to put my play on the road, I'll accept it, with the understanding that it is to be returned if the play proves to be a winner. That's the only favor you can do for me."

"I'll do it. How much do you want?"

"I couldn't say, sir, without consulting with an experienced advance man I propose to engage if the project goes through; but it will probably be as much as a couple of thousands."

"Stanley Hope," said the broker, "I will back you up in this ambitious effort of yours to any reasonable amount, whether it be two thousand dollars or twenty thousand dollars. Start right ahead, and call on me for the cash as you need it. As an earnest of my purpose I'll give you my check for the two thousand dollars you have suggested right here," and the gentleman produced his check book.

"As a loan, sir," said Stanley.

"Of course, as a loan, if you insist on having it that way."

He wrote the check and handed it to the boy.

"Thank you, Mr. Clarke."

"Don't mention it, and remember when you want more call for it at my office in the Anchor Building, LaSalle Street. Here is my card."

That terminated the interview, and Stanley dashed upstairs to Miss Price's room.

"Congratulate me, Eva," he cried, rushing to her side, flushed and breathless.

"On what?" she asked, with a smile.

"On my good luck. I'm going to put 'Nugget Nell' on the road at once. I've found an 'angel.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

STARTING THE SHOW.

That evening, after Stanley had taken Eva around to the stage door of the Gaiety Theater, he started off to hunt up Mr. Singer, the advance agent.

He found him in a billiard and pool parlor near the cheap hotel where he was stopping.

"Hello, Stanley," said Singer. "I couldn't come around this afternoon, as I was busy."

"What at? Playing pool?"

"No. I had a date with a manager who's going to send repertory company on the road."

"That so?" replied Stanley, doubtfully. "Did you contact?"

Singer shook his head and went on playing pool.

"Well, do you want a job?" asked Stanley.

Singer paused and looked at him.

"Heard of something in my line?"

"How much do you want?"

"Fifty and expenses," replied Singer, promptly.

"Too much," replied Stanley. "Make it forty and pay your own, and maybe—"

"Who's the gent that wants an advance man? Is he good for the money?"

"I'll guarantee he is," laughed Stanley. "I saw a two-thousand-dollar check in his hand an hour ago, and I know there's more where that came from."

"The deuce you say. I'm your man. Take me around and introduce me to him," and Singer dropped his cue.

"Finish your game, and then we'll talk business," said the boy, coolly.

Singer finished the game and then took a seat alongside of Stanley.

"Who is this manager, and how did you run across him? Are you and Miss Price going out with him?"

"I'll answer your last question first, Mr. Singer. Miss Price is going out with him as star in a new Western drama on the lines of 'Golden Gulch.' It is called 'Nugget Nell.'"

"That isn't half bad. Has he got his paper ready?"

"He's got nothing ready—yet; but he'll have everything soon—don't you worry."

"Can we go around and see him now?" asked Singer, eagerly.

"It isn't necessary. I represent him."

"You!" exclaimed the advance agent, in astonishment.

"Yes. I've got the whole thing in hand."

"The deuce you say. Look here, Stanley, what's this you're giving me?"

"Straight goods."

"But I can't make arrangements with you. I want to know who I'm dealing with."

"Well, you're dealing with me."

"That won't do. I want some definite agreement about my money."

"You shall have it. Now listen: I'll offer you a contract at forty dollars per week, you to pay your own expenses, transportation, of course, excepted. You're to remain here and act as business manager until the show is about ready to go out. You're to start in at once and secure as much of the open time of the late 'Golden Gulch' company as you can get. Where dates have been filled by another attraction, try some other town with a short jump. You'll help me arrange for the paper and the scenery and props. If we can get hold of some fairly good drops that

will answer the purpose of the drama until new scenery is painted, so much the better—we'll get out all the sooner."

"Say, Stanley, you are telling this story pretty well, but I've got to have a guarantee that I will get my salary."

"I'll get it for you. I'll have your contract made out and your salary guaranteed by a member of the Chicago Board of Trade."

Singer whistled.

"Say, Stanley, has Miss Price found an angel?"

"No, she hasn't," replied the boy, shortly.

"Then why is this broker backing the show?"

"Mr. Singer, that needn't concern you at all. If you want this job, say so, and the contract will be ready for you to sign this afternoon."

"I'll take it."

"All right. Call around at the St. Charles Hotel at two o'clock."

"I'll do so. By the way, Stanley, how did you catch on to such a good thing? You seem to be managing the enterprise."

"I am; but I expect you to help me out. I want to give you a tip that you mustn't fool yourself into the idea that I'm an easy proposition. I know what I'm about. I may not be up in the business just yet, but I know enough about it to tell whether you are doing the right thing or not. I wasn't six months in Mr. Bloodgood's office for nothing."

Singer grinned.

"If Miss Price didn't find the angel it is evident that you did. Take the advice of an old stager in the business—nurse him. When he's in the humor pull his leg good and hard. Let him understand that backing a show is an expensive luxury. If I was you I'd steer him alongside of Miss Price without loss of time. She'll be able to hold him in line much better than you."

"Mr. Singer, please omit Miss Price's name from our business arrangements except in a professional way. You may as well understand first, last and for all time that Eva Price is one of the best little women in the world, and I don't propose to use her as a decoy—an entirely unnecessary proceeding in this case, anyway."

Singer looked surprised, but said nothing.

Stanley's alert manner and straight-to-the-point talk was something of a revelation to him as coming from a boy.

Clearly there was a reserve force in the lad that he had not calculated on.

"Now, Mr. Singer, I'd take it as a favor if you'd try and hunt up a suitable hall this morning for the company to rehearse in, and report to me at the hotel."

"I'll do it. In fact, I know of two or three places that will suit."

"Then secure the best one, and I'll see the proprietor later and close with him."

"All right," agreed the advance man, and the interview ended.

Stanley, who had consulted with Eva as to the people needed, went to a booking agency and had a talk with the agent.

The man had enough talent on his books to make up the company, but he could not say that he could reach all of them.

"Several haven't showed up lately, and may have got work," he said, "but I'll be able to get all you want in a few days."

Stanley paid him his retainer, and promised to be on hand on the following afternoon to meet the people and sign them for a season of thirty weeks.

The boy then went to a big show printing house and ordered his paper, the copy for which he and Eva had got up between them.

He also furnished the printer with rough sketches for his artist to make poster cuts for three of the most telling situations in the drama.

He paid a suitable deposit on the work, and arranged to have it delivered by express C. O. D. at the different towns along the company's route. A list of these, with dates for delivery, and quantity required at each town, he agreed to furnish later.

The printer had blank contract forms standing in type, and in half an hour furnished Stanley with all he needed, with his name inserted as the manager.

He filled out one with Mr. Singer's name, and took it down to Mr. Clarke's office and asked him as a favor to guarantee the salary, which the broker immediately did by indorsing it to that effect on the back.

At two o'clock Singer appeared at the Hotel St. Charles, and the contract was handed to him, with a duplicate, which he signed and which Stanley retained.

"I've got the hall for you," the advance man said, and he gave Stanley its name, location, and where the proprietor could be seen.

Stanley then furnished him with a list of the scenes and properties that were required, and told him to see about the matter without loss of time.

"Make the best prices you can, and get second-hand stuff that is available, if possible. First of all, however, go down to the Chicago Printing Company and get some of my letter-heads, which will be ready by four o'clock, and send out at once your applications for dates along the 'Golden Gulch' route. As soon as the company gets into harness you will arrange with the railroad company for transportation for twelve people at the usual professional rates. That's all for the present. You had better attend to the routing of the show at once—it will take a little time."

Singer left the hotel with the consciousness that Stanley meant business from his head down, and that John Bloodgood could not have started things off much better.

CHAPTER XV.

STANLEY'S PLAY STARTS WITH A PACKED HOUSE.

After Singer left the hotel Stanley took the manuscript of his play to the office of a public stenographer accustomed to dramatic copying, and left it with directions that he

must have all the parts typewritten by noon on the following day.

This being guaranteed, he paid a deposit on the job and left.

He then returned to the hotel and spent the balance of the afternoon talking over the situation with Eva.

"I feel it in my bones, Stanley, that this play of yours will be a go," she said, "and that you'll make both fame and fortune out of it."

"Well, if things turn out the way you think, I shall owe it all to you, Eva."

"What makes you think so?" she asked smilingly.

"Because you'll be the whole show. People will go to see you—the play will be only a side issue," he answered.

"Nonsense!" she replied, laying her hand almost caressingly on his arm. "Your play has all the elements of success. It will attract the masses, while I will only cater to them after you get them into the house. If I make a hit as Nugget Nell, it will be because you have furnished the means for me to display my ability."

"You are bound to make a hit, Eva. You did that in Miggles, and I believe that the part of Nugget Nell fits you much better."

"I'm sure that it does, and I'm going to play it for all I am worth, not only because I like the part, but for your sake, Stanley."

"Why particularly for my sake? Why not say for the sake of your professional reputation?"

"No, for your sake," she replied, looking at him with eyes that shone like diamonds. "Do you think that I ever can forget that it was to your pluck and strong arm I owe my life? What have I yet done to repay you for the risk you took that day in my behalf? Nothing. But now I see a chance to repay you by putting my very best efforts into Nugget Nell. I'll play that part as I never played a part before. I'll make the play a winner from the start-off, and I'll do it for you, and you only, Stanley."

"Eva," said the boy, taking her two hands in his and looking her straight in the eyes, "if anybody can make my play go it is you. You are very good to interest yourself so much in me. There, now, don't attempt to deny it. You say you've done nothing as yet for me. Why, haven't you helped and encouraged me with my drama? Haven't you assisted me in building it up from the first crude form in which I submitted it to you to something worth while? If I should happen by good luck to win fame and fortune out of it, is it not through you all this will come to me? Yes, through you, little girl. Then will not you promise to share with me that good luck? Fame and fortune is nothing to me, Eva, without you. If I only can win you, all the rest are but side issues. I love you, Eva. I've loved you ever since the moment I held you in my arms as we swung back and forth at the end of that rope in LeBrun's studio. I want you to be my wife some day when I'm able to take care of you. When that time comes will you marry me?"

"Yes, Stanley, I will," replied the little actress, throwing her arms around his neck and looking her boy lover in

face, "for I love you with all my heart, with every of my nature."

hen Stanley drew her to him and sealed their betrothal the kiss of love.

hat evening Stanley went to Mr. Torrens's boarding-
se.

apping on the heavy man's door, he was bidden to enter. Marry, but you are welcome, Stanley," said the actor, was reading a torn copy of "Hamlet." "I was reading r my old part that I played with Booth. Prithee, is ything in the wind? You have the look of one that areth intelligence."

"Do you want a job?" asked the boy, smiling.

"Do I want a job?" repeated the actor, dropping the lay-book on the floor. "By my halidom, that is exactly that I do want. Dost know of any opening?"

"What salary do you want?"

"Don't ask me that. I'll go out for twenty dollars and my expenses, or I'll pay my own, transportation excepted, for twenty-five dollars."

Stanley took a contract from his pocket, laid it on the table and filled in twenty-five dollars.

"Sign that, Mr. Torrens, and here is a tenner on account."

"Is it for the heavy leads, Stanley?" he asked, as he hastily took down an almost dried-out ink bottle and an antiquated pen from a shelf.

"Well, hardly. You're cast for first old man in the four-act Western melodrama of 'Nugget Nell.' I want you to do your best, Mr. Torrens, as I am the author of the play and manager of the company."

"You're what?" almost gasped the actor, pausing as he was about to affix his signature to the contract.

Stanley repeated his statement.

The heavy man expressed his astonishment, and then timidly asked the boy where the cash was coming from to put the venture on the road.

"One of Chicago's big grain brokers is backing me."

"Ha! Thou hast secured a most excellent angel. I congratulate thee, boy. It is a comforting reflection to perceive that the 'ghost'* is likely to walk with some regularity."

"It will walk all right, Mr. Torrens, unless business gets uncommonly bad, which I hope won't happen."

"Gadzooks! I hope not. There is your contract, and thanks, most reverend and noble signior, for the bill. Let us adjourn to the corner and quaff a cup of mead in honor of this momentous occasion. I hope that fame and fortune await thee on the road. Depend on it, I will do my best to reflect honor on my part. Where are the lines?"

"Call to-morrow at five at my hotel and you shall have the part."

"I will be there to the minute," replied Mr. Torrens. "When and where do we begin rehearsals?"

"At Michigan Hall, on Blank Street, Monday morning at ten."

"It is well," and the actor rose and put on his hat.

Stanley excused himself from accompanying him to the corner, and walked back to the Gaiety Theater to wait for Eva.

On the following day Stanley went to the theatrical agent's office, where he met and signed most of the professional people he wanted for his company.

He distributed the parts and told them to report at Michigan Hall for rehearsal on Monday morning.

Several struck him for advances, and he gave up a small sum to the needy ones.

That afternoon Mr. Singer reported that he had found four sets of second-hand scenery that with slight alterations would fill the bill.

One or two set pieces would have to be built and painted, but the outfit would be ready for delivery at the close of the next week.

He had also secured all the necessary properties.

Stanley accompanied him to the storage-house and put up the money demanded.

He was assured that everything would be ready at the time stated.

Mr. Singer said that he had written for all the dates made vacant by the stoppage of "Golden Gulch," and he expected that things would pan out all right so that they could take the road in a fortnight.

This suited Stanley all right.

On Monday morning the company gathered at Michigan Hall and Stanley read his play to them.

They all declared it to be a winner.

The man engaged to play the villain was an old stage manager, and Stanley gave him charge of the stage.

The rehearsals were conducted on the dancing floor of the hall, chairs and a table or two being made to represent certain set pieces that were in the play.

The leader of the Gaiety Theater arranged the music for Eva's songs and dances, and appeared at two of the rehearsals to put her through her paces, as well as to familiarize the company with the music cues.

He wrote out the necessary orchestra parts for all the incidental music, as well as Eva's music.

Singer got most all the dates of the late "Golden Gulch" company, and left Chicago for the first town on their route on Thursday of the second week.

On Friday evening Stanley got the following telegram from him:

"Geneva, Ill., Sept. 28.

"Mr. Stanley Hope,

St. Charles Hotel, Chicago, Ill.

"Town well billed. You're in great luck. Political convention here on Monday afternoon. Town will be full of strangers. They'll want to go somewhere. Even a cat-and-dog show will pack them to the doors.

"WILLIAM L. SINGER."

*Among theatrical people the "ghost walks" when salaries are paid.

Stanley showed the dispatch to Eva.

"That's a good omen, Stanley," she said, with a happy smile. "It will be S. R. O., without a doubt."

"I hope so," he answered, with a pleased smile, taking her lovely face between his two hands and kissing her pouting lips. "Nugget Nell, you are the golden nugget out of which my fame and fortune will spring."

"You mean our fame and fortune, Stanley," she said softly.

The final rehearsal was held on Sunday at the hall, and on Monday morning the company started for Geneva.

No special car was required for the scenery, properties and baggage of "Nugget Nell."

It was loaded aboard of the regular baggage car, and duly put off on the platform at Geneva when the train reached the station, where a transfer wagon was in waiting to carry it to the Opera House.

The company all went to the same hotel, and after dinner a rehearsal was called at the theater to familiarize the people with the scenery and appointments of the play.

The leader of the orchestra had been sent for to take charge of the music and make himself acquainted with his part of the show.

Stanley found the most encouraging prospects at the box office, for two-thirds of the house had been sold, and the local manager assured him that the theater would be packed to the doors.

And so it proved.

Even standing room was at a premium when the curtain rose on the first act of "Nugget Nell" on its opening night.

CHAPTER XVI.

EVA SCORES A TRIUMPH IN NUGGET NELL.

The interior of the theater that night presented an encouraging and exhilarating sight not only to the performers, but to the young author whose first play was about to receive its initial performance.

Eva Price was bubbling over with delight and enthusiasm, for she was as much interested in the success of the play as was Stanley.

Although the front of the house required the boy's presence as manager of the show in order to protect his interests, he managed to go inside and witness Eva's whirlwind entrance soon after the curtain went up.

After the first act was well under way, and Eva was carrying the audience with her as Nugget Nell, Stanley accompanied the local manager to the box office to count up the receipts.

"I haven't had such a house since last Christmas night, when the 'Wizard of Oz' was here," said the manager, beamingly.

"The paid admissions amount to eight hundred and ninety-eight dollars," he said, when the statement had been prepared and footed up.

"Of which I get sixty-five per cent., replied Stanley.

"Exactly, less, of course, my billboard charges, and an I. O. U. from Mr. Singer for ten dollars. The other bills will be in about nine o'clock. Your advance man contracted for a special advertisement in to-day's paper, and for a wagon and transparency to parade the town this afternoon."

After all bills had been settled, Stanley tucked away something like five hundred and fifty dollars in his clothes, and then went back on the stage.

The first act was over and the men folks were coming out to "see a man."

Eva assured Stanley that the first act had gone off as smooth as silk, while the stage manager and other performers gathered around and congratulated him on his auspicious start.

"Gadzooks!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens, who was made up as an old miner—the father of Nugget Nell. "This puts me in mind of when I played with Booth. Ah, he could draw a house. The drama is not what it was."

"I'm sorry that I couldn't give you a better part, Mr. Torrens, but—"

"Say no more, Stanley. I am quite satisfied to do my best in anything for you. I mean to do thee full justice for my five-and-twenty per. Once, you will remember, the vampire called me rotten. Methinks it was an unkind remark," said the old actor, shaking his head in a melancholy way. "Thou shalt have no cause to repeat the expression to my disadvantage. To-night I feel the old fire in my bones. Perchance were the vampire here he might regret casting me off like an old shoe."

Stanley wormed his way into the crowded auditorium to catch a glimpse of the second act.

It was in this act that Eva introduced her most attractive specialty, and it caught on like wildfire.

The audience, two-thirds of which was composed of men, went into ecstasies over her singing and dancing.

She was recalled again and again, until she had to beg off.

Every time she appeared on the stage she was applauded, and there was not any doubt but she was the show.

"Why, that soubrette of yours has every other one I've seen skinned to death," remarked the local manager to Stanley. "Where did you get her?"

"In New York," he replied. "She was one of the hits of 'Mademoiselle Bonbon' at the Lyric."

"You must pay her big money, otherwise I don't see how you can hold her."

"I can hold her, all right," answered Stanley, with a confident smile.

"Then you're lucky. It pays, I guess, to carry a good thing along. It pulls the business every time. I'd like to give you a return date."

"Not this season, Mr. Bradley."

The play went on with great satisfaction to the spectators.

All the other performers acquitted themselves fairly well for a first night in a new piece; even the ancient Mr. Tor-

rens was distinctly good as the poor old drunken father of the heroine.

Eva made her biggest hit, as Stanley expected she would, at the close of the third act, when she played the villain a game of poker for the Poker Flat mining claim, as we described in Chapter VII.

The entire sympathy of the house was with her in the game.

When the villain laughed and raised her ten thousand dollars—all she had—by fifty thousand dollars, the price he valued the claim at, a storm of hisses burst from the gallery, and even from the orchestra seats.

When the lover then stepped forward and handed her the deed of the Little Nugget mine of Nevada to help her out, the house fairly shook with enthusiasm.

"And I place it against that Poker Flat claim and call him," cried Nell, amid a perfect furore of enthusiasm.

Amid a breathless hush the villain showed up his four kings.

Then Nugget Nell sprang to her feet and held up the four aces so that half the audience could distinguish them.

The roar of excitement that went up from the audience was for a moment simply terrific.

You would have thought the house was on fire, or that a riot was in progress.

Then when the villain pulled his bowie knife on her and she covered him with a brace of revolvers, saying, "And a pair of sixes!" the spectators went wild with satisfaction.

Of course Eva had to come before the curtain, which she did, holding on to the hand of her stage lover, and the house rose to her, as the saying is.

After that the villain walked on, and what the gallery didn't do to him isn't worth mentioning.

CHAPTER XVII.

FAME AND FORTUNE.

After the performance was over and the actors had resumed their every-day garb, they returned to the Geneva House, where a cold lunch was awaiting them, served by the proprietor of the hotel without extra charge to his theatrical patrons after the show as a means of encouraging professional trade.

All hands were naturally in high spirits, for a big house always has an exhilarating effect on the average professional.

In his mind's eye he sees the ghost walking in decidedly healthy fashion on the coming Monday, and that is a comforting reflection, especially to those unfortunates who have just been up against hard luck.

Stanley himself was tickled to death over the cheerful beginning of his theatrical venture, as well as the enthusiastic reception accorded to Eva, and incidentally his play.

While he did not drink himself, he was aware that the members of his company had a leaning in that direction, and he felt that it would be a graceful thing on his part

to add a few bottles of champagne to the midnight lunch on such an auspicious occasion as this was.

So he gave the order to the hotel man and the boniface produced the wine.

The supper was heartily enjoyed by the company.

The champagne was evidently a luxury to which most of them were strangers.

It loosened up their tongues and polished up their wits, so that all became very merry before the meal was half over.

"I notice that you are not drinking, Mr. Hope," said Frank Harding, the leading juvenile, who enacted the part of the lover in the play.

"I never drink, Mr. Harding," replied the young manager, with a smile.

"Well," said William Chase, the low comedian, with a chuckle, "I never drink wine, either—when it's out of my reach."

At this point Talbot Torrens rose to his feet and asked for silence.

"My professional friends, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that we are all agreed that our young manager, Stanley Hope, who is also the author of the piece, has this evening scored both an artistic and financial triumph," he began.

"Hear, hear!" cried Mr. McKean, the heavy man.

"I have had the honor of Mr. Hope's acquaintance for several months, and it gives me great pleasure to say that I have always found him to be a good friend to his professional brother."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the comedian.

"I therefore propose Stanley Hope's health, and may he win fame and fortune before the end of this season."

The health was enthusiastically drunk, Eva and Stanley participating with a glass of water.

"Ladies and gentlemen," responded Stanley, rising, "I thank you for your congratulations and good wishes, and can only say that I trust to deserve a continuance of the same. The play to-night has certainly been a success, but its success, I need scarcely say, is wholly due to the magnetic abilities of Miss Evangeline Vance, or, as we know her, Eva Price."

"That's right," nodded one of the company.

"This is no surprise to me, for Miss Price demonstrated what she was capable of this spring in New York when she made a distinct hit at the Lyric in the musical comedy of 'Mademoiselle Bonbon.'"

This statement occasioned something of a sensation in the company.

None of them dreamed that the little soubrette of this company had enjoyed what all actors are crazy to get—a New York opening.

It is true they were compelled to acknowledge her evident ability, but they set it down to the fact that the part of Nugget Nell fitted her so well.

Now they were at a loss to understand how it came about that an actress who had achieved a distinct metropolitan

hit in a first-class theater should be out with a melodrama, even though she was the star of the play.

"Therefore, ladies and gentlemen," went on Stanley, "I ask you all to drink to the health of Eva Price."

This was done with much enthusiasm.

Soon afterward the supply of wine gave out and the supper party broke up.

The next night the company played at Aurora to a fair-sized house, which waxed enthusiastic over the star and the piece.

Wednesday night they showed in York to a satisfactory house, after which came Ottawa and Streator, and on Saturday night "Nugget Nell" drew a record crowd at Peoria.

The last three nights of the succeeding week they drew big houses at Springfield, the capital of the State, and from there went straight to St. Louis, where they had a week stand.

Here, with the single exception of Monday night, they played to the capacity of the theater, and the manager of the house assured Stanley that he had an uncommonly fine dual attraction—in the piece and in Evangeline Vance.

With a cheap company, Eva excepted, and all playing well together, Stanley was making money.

At the end of the eighth week the boy, who had sent encouraging reports of his tour to Mr. Clarke, the Chicago broker, forwarded to that gentleman every cent he had received from him in backing the company at the outset.

After that good luck continued to follow the "Nugget Nell" company wherever it showed, and Stanley's money barrel filled rapidly.

The company worked all through the Middle West, mostly playing one-night stands, except where they held time in a big city.

The "Golden Gulch" organization had secured time at both the West End and New Star theaters in New York to wind up the season.

Mr. Singer, however, failed to recover it for the "Nugget Nell" company, so it looked as if the organization would have to close at the end of the twenty-eighth week, unless he could fill in somewhere else.

It happened that the day he reached New York he heard that an attraction holding four weeks at the Fourteenth Street Theater had come to grief, and he lost no time in bracing the New York manager for an opening.

He probably would not have succeeded, as the manager had his eye on another attraction, but for the fact that he mentioned the great success Evangeline Vance was making in his own show.

The fact that this metropolitan favorite of the previous season was heading the "Nugget Nell" company brought the New York manager to terms at once, and Singer got the time.

He immediately wired the news to Stanley, and there was great joy in the "Nugget Nell" combination.

The company duly reached New York and appeared at the Fourteenth Street Theater on Monday night.

Stanley and Eva were, of course, joyfully welcomed at

the little flat in Harlem, where they were both at home once more.

Tuesday morning's papers praised Eva to the skies, and spoke very handsomely about "Nugget Nell."

The favorable notices brought a rush of business to the house, and night after night the theater was jammed to the doors to see Miss Vance.

On Wednesday, Stanley astonished Mr. Bloodgood, as well as Miss Sanderson, by walking into the office looking like a young aristocrat.

"Well, Mr. Bloodgood, I've made a barrel of money out of the play you turned down. 'Nugget Nell' and Eva Price just pulled the people in ever since we left Chicago. Now we're playing to S. R. O. at the Fourteenth Street, and I'm willing to bet that we'll have the biggest four weeks' receipts of the season there."

"Nugget Nell" was such a success that the four weeks were extended to eight, and the company and the house both closed the season together.

With one or two changes, Stanley took out the same company, with brand-new scenery and splendid paper, the next season, and his success was more pronounced, for he secured time at leading cities from the Atlantic to the Missouri River.

He made a raft of money on this tour, and when he got back to New York at the close of the season he was besieged by several managers to write a play for them, but declined with thanks.

One of these managers was John Bloodgood.

Before Stanley and Eva went on their vacation they were quietly married at the Little Church Around the Corner, and three days later left for a trip to Europe on one of the big liners.

Although only twenty, Stanley had practically won fame as a dramatist, and actually won a fortune as the manager of his own company.

To-day he's at the very top of the managerial ladder, and a score of big managers would be willing to pay him a big price for a play; but he writes only for his little wife, to whom he lovingly says he is indebted for both FAME AND FORTUNE.

THE END.

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